

STREAMS OF LIVING WATER



December Connection Guide

Advent

OVERVIEW

We pause our “CrossWords” series to bring you a special Advent theme: Steams of Living Water

Month	Relational Words	Worship Words	Related Psalm
September	I’m listening	Illumination	Psalm 119: 9-11
October	Bless you	Blessing	Psalm 103
November	Thank you	Thanksgiving	Psalm 136
December	Advent	Streams of Living Water	
January	Help	Supplication	Psalm 86
February	I’m sorry	Confession	Psalm 51
March	Why	Lament	Psalm 13
April	I love you	Praise	Psalm 95
May	What can I do?	Service	Psalm 116

We
are
here

WHAT’S IN THIS GUIDE

This guide is a little different than others in our CrossWords series. While it does include sections on connecting with scripture and our tradition, it also includes a new week-by-week guide to our advent theme: “Streams of Living Water”. As you engage with Georgetown in worship, either in person or through video, we hope this series will broaden your understanding and empower you to live as faithful follower of Jesus.

STREAMS OF LIVING WATER

In his book, *Streams of Living Water* ([New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998](#)) author Richard Foster suggests that Christianity is comprised of six great traditions of the faith: Contemplative, Holiness, Social Justice, Charismatic, Incarnational, and Evangelical. Using the image of a river that swells as its tributaries flow into it, Foster refers to these traditions as “streams of spiritual life” which combine to produce a community of faith and life that he calls “a mighty river of the Spirit.” Although each of these streams developed independently of the others and was characterized by specific historical, cultural, and geographical features, he notes that God is moving in our day to bring these streams together in a mighty flow of the Spirit. Our Advent series this year takes one character (or group of characters) from the Christmas Story to represent each of these six streams, and our prayer is that this will help us to see the big picture of the Christian faith. While believers often focus on the differences between faith traditions, this will call us instead to remember the one thing that binds Christians of all time, places, and doctrinal differences together: the worship of the Child of Bethlehem!

RESOURCES:

Section summaries: [Reformed Worship](#), Peter Hoytema, senior pastor at Midland Park Christian Reformed Church, Midland Park, New Jersey.

Prayers: [The Complete Book of Christian Prayer](#) (Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2000)

Questions excerpted from: [Streams of Living Water Resource Guide](#)

Art: Courtesy of [Ron Van Der Pol](#): artist, educator, and designer

STREAMS OF LIVING WATER IN SCRIPTURE

BIBLE READINGS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER AND YOUR RESPONSE

Dec.	Text	Your one sentence takeaway
1	Luke 1:26-33	
2	Luke 1:34-38	
3	Luke 1:46-55	
4	Luke 2:25-35	
5	John 17:25-26	
6	Matthew 1:18-25	
7	Luke 1:67-79	
8	John 8:12	
9	Romans 1:1-5	
10	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	
11	Romans 8:31-39	
12	Isaiah 40:1-11	
13	Isaiah 61:1-3	
14	John 1:29-34	
15	Mark 1:35-39	
16	1 Samuel 2:1-10	
17	Amos 5:11-24	
18	Matthew 11:1-6	
19	Luke 4:17-19	
20	Luke 2:8-14	
21	Luke 2: 15-20	
22	Isaiah 61:10-11	
23	1 Timothy 1:14-16	
24	1 Peter 1:8-12	
25	John 1:14	
26	Philippians 2:5-11	
27	John 6:35-40	
28	Isaiah 9:6-7	
29	John 17:22-24	
30	Matthew 28:18-20	
31	Revelation 11:15, 12:10	

STREAMS OF LIVING WATER IN OUR TRADITION

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, Q & A 31

“Q. Why is he called “Christ,” meaning “anointed”?

A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance; our only high priest who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.”

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, Q & A 35

“Q: What does it mean that he “was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary”?

A: That the eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took to himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit, from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, a truly human nature so that he might also become David’s true descendant, like his brothers and sisters in every way except for sin.”

BELGIC CONFESSION, ARTICLE 19

“We believe that by being thus conceived the person of the Son has been inseparably united and joined together with human nature, in such a way that there are not two Sons of God, nor two persons, but two natures united in a single person, with each nature retaining its own distinct properties.

Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life, filling heaven and earth.

Christ’s human nature has not lost its properties but continues to have those of a creature—it has a beginning of days; it is of a finite nature and retains all that belongs to a real body. And even though he, by his resurrection, gave it immortality, that nonetheless did not change the reality of his human nature; for our salvation and resurrection depend also on the reality of his body.

But these two natures are so united together in one person that they are not even separated by his death. So then, what he committed to his Father when he died was a real human spirit which left his body. But meanwhile his divine nature remained united with his human nature even when he was lying in the grave; and his deity never ceased to be in him, just as it was in him when he was a little child, though for a while it did not so reveal itself.

These are the reasons why we confess him to be true God and truly human—true God in order to conquer death by his power, and truly human that he might die for us in the weakness of his flesh.”

OUR WORLD BELONGS TO GOD, PARAGRAPH 23

“Remembering the promise to reconcile the world to himself, God joined our humanity in Jesus Christ—the eternal Word made flesh. He is the long-awaited Messiah, one with us and one with God, fully human and fully divine, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.”



- *Our tradition testifies the two natures of Christ, human and divine, are both fully present in Jesus. Which of the natures do you think usually gets the most attention? Why might the other aspect get minimized?*
- *What are the implications of God joining our humanity in Jesus Christ? How might that give us comfort? How might it challenge our assumptions?*

STREAMS OF LIVING WATER

WEEK BY WEEK GUIDE TO OUR ADVENT THEME

NOVEMBER 29 | MARY AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE STREAM

OVERVIEW:

“The contemplative life is the steady gaze of the soul upon the God who loves us,” says Richard Foster. “It is ‘an intimate sharing between friends,’ to use the words of Teresa of Avila”. At the heart of this prayer-filled life is attentiveness to who God is and what God is doing. Of course, God is much more than our friend, but the reason why we can be attentive to God is because of the attention God has given to the humble individuals Mary alludes to in her song. Mary’s song exemplifies the contemplative tradition because it celebrates the activity of God in human life. While she is initially troubled by God’s plan for her, she agrees to partner with God in the accomplishment of his will. And today we celebrate that very reality in our lives. The contemplative tradition emphasizes the fact that God is mindful of us and continues to invite us to play a role in the doing of his will in the world.

PRAYER:

Lord! Going out from this silence, teach me to be more alert, humble, expectant, than I have been in the past: ever ready to encounter you in quiet, homely ways: in every appeal to my compassion, every act of unselfish love which shows up and humbles my imperfect love, may I recognize you: still walking through the world. Give me that grace of simplicity which alone can receive your mystery. Come and abide with me! Meet me, walk with me! Enlighten my mind! And then, Come in! Enter my humble life with its poverty and limitations as you entered the stable of Bethlehem, the workshop of Nazareth, the cottage of Emmaus. Bless and consecrate the material of that small and ordinary life. Amen.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941)

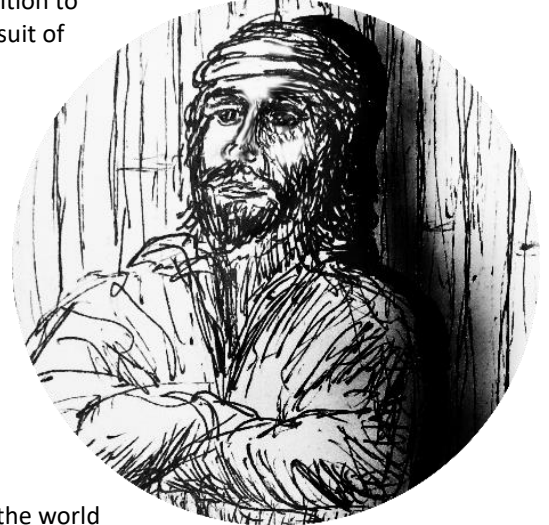


- *What are some things you do to live more moments of your life in loving attention to God?*
- *What are some of your primary distractions from living in awareness of God’s presence and love?*
- *Have there been times in your life—even if only for moments—when the love of God was your only focus? How would you describe the emotions of those times?*

OVERVIEW:

The world does not place a great deal of emphasis on holiness. It cramps our style. It restricts our freedom. Contemporary voices frequently emphasize the importance of keeping one’s religious devotion a private matter, severed from public morality. Add to this the fact that our world often equates holiness with being “holier-than-thou,” and the challenge of affirming the contributions of the holiness tradition to Christian faith and life is all the greater. Yet Christians are called to the pursuit of holiness. Both the Old and New Testaments affirm that we are to be holy because God is holy. The closer we get to God, the more like God we become. Richard Foster puts it this way: “Holiness is progress in purity and sanctity. We are set apart for divine purposes” (Streams, p. 84).

No wonder Joseph—a righteous man who earnestly seeks to do God’s will, no matter the cost—is such a good representative of this tradition. Joseph models holiness, what Foster calls the ability to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. Have you ever noticed that Joseph does not speak a single word in the gospels? His actions matter more. And among his actions, his decision to reevaluate his concept of righteousness stands tall. Joseph had every right to divorce Mary. The law was on his side. But God’s message to Joseph made it clear that the baby Mary was carrying redefines righteousness.



As Frederick Dale Bruner puts it, “from the instant that Jesus appeared on the world scene, even at his conception, he caused righteous people to rethink what was righteous.” This transformation is precisely what every believer experiences. Jesus redefines righteousness because he is himself the righteousness of God, who reveals God’s holiness, models it perfectly, and invites us to participate in it.

PRAYER:

Let your goodness, Lord, appear to us, that we, made in your image, conform ourselves to it. In our own strength we cannot imitate your majesty, power, and wonder; nor is it fitting for us to try. But your mercy reaches from the heavens, through the clouds, to the earth below. You have come to us as a small child, but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts, the gift of eternal love. Caress us with your tiny hands, embrace us with your tiny arms, and pierce our hearts with your soft, sweet cries. Amen.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)

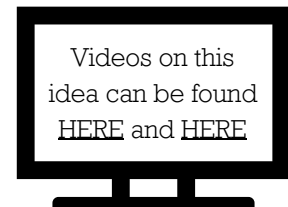


- *When you hear the word holiness, what are the first images that come to your mind? How might the pursuit of holiness be more than our first impressions of the idea?*
- *How would you go about attempting holy living at work or school tomorrow?*
- *What does it mean to you to be someone within whom Christ dwells?*

OVERVIEW:

While the contemplative and holiness traditions focus inward primarily, cultivating a prayer-filled and virtuous life, the social justice tradition compels us to look beyond ourselves to a world that aches for redemption and release. Many of us tend to live such sheltered lives that we fail to see the reality of human existence in the world at large. According to one study, if the entire world’s population were reduced to a village of 100 people, this is what life in that village would be like:

- 57 inhabitants would be Asian, 21 European, 14 from the Western Hemisphere, and 8 African
- 70 would be people of color, 30 Caucasian
- 70 non-Christian, 30 Christian
- Half of all the wealth would be in the hands of 6 people and all 6 would live in the United States
- 70 would be illiterate, 30 literate
- 50 would suffer from severe malnutrition
- 80 would live in sub-standard housing
- only one person would have a college or university degree

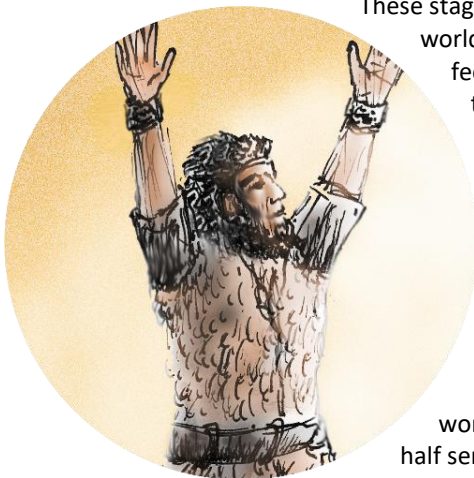


These staggering figures point out the urgency of bringing the witness of the gospel to the world around us. As Foster writes, we practice the social justice tradition when “we feed the hungry. We help the helpless. We reach out to the orphan, the widow, the weak, the shoved aside” (Streams, p. 174). The preaching of John the Baptist confirms the importance of living the compassionate life—repenting of injustice and oppression and working to achieve the shalom of God’s kingdom here on earth. That’s particularly appropriate to remember during this Advent season, when we give expression to our hope for the return of Jesus. When Jesus comes back he will bring his kingdom to earth completely. Whatever sin has made crooked, Jesus’ justice will make permanently straight once more.

PRAYER:

Here is a gaping sore, Lord: half the world diets, the other half hungers; half the world is housed, the other half homeless; half the world pursues profit, the other half senses loss. Redeem our souls, redeem our peoples, redeem our times. Amen.

John Bell (b. 1949)



- Describe your most positive associations or involvements with the Social Justice Stream.
- What are some factors that motivate you to be involved with Social Justice?
- What are some reasons (if any) that hold you back from becoming even more involved?
- Call to mind some of your “neighbors” (anyone near to you) who may be victimized by injustice. What is one concrete way you can become involved in the situation as a source of compassion?
- Richard Foster calls Matthew 22:37-40 the “fulcrum” of the Social Justice Tradition: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” It follows that loving others—especially if they are our enemies—is not something that will naturally flow from us. What are some specific ways you have found for tapping into and becoming a conduit for the love of God?



Richard Foster calls the charismatic tradition “a life immersed in, empowered by, and under the direction of the Spirit of God” (Streams, p. 132). When Reformed Christians hear the word charismatic, they often think of ecstatic worship or an emphasis on supernatural gifts like speaking in tongues or prophecy.

How surprised many of them are to hear that John Calvin is known as “the theologian of the Holy Spirit!”

At the heart of this stream is the simple truth that the Holy Spirit is the means by which we are brought to faith in Jesus Christ. When this happens, as the shepherds wonderfully model for us, two important things occur:

- We are filled with great joy. Notice how the shepherds hurry to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus, and how they return glorifying and praising God.
- We are compelled to tell others about what we have seen and heard. The charismatic tradition emphasizes the urgency of “spreading the word” to others.

Joy and witness. Ecstasy and evangelism. Both are key ingredients of a well-rounded Christian life.



PRAYER:

The feast day of your birth resembles you, Lord, because it brings joy to all humanity. Old people and infants alike enjoy your day. Your day is celebrated from generation to generation. Kings and emperors may pass away, and the festivals to commemorate them soon lapse. But your festival will be remembered till the end of time. Your day is a means and a pledge of peace. At your birth, heaven and earth were reconciled; since you came from heaven to earth on that day you forgave our sins and wiped away our guilt. You gave us so many gifts on your birthday: a treasure chest of spiritual medicines for the sick; spiritual light for those that are blind; the cup of salvation for the thirsty; the bread of life for the hungry. In the winter when trees are bare, you give us the most succulent spiritual fruit. In the frost when the earth is barren, you bring new hope to our souls. In December when seeds are hidden in the soil, the staff of life springs from the virgin womb. Amen.

Ephraim the Syrian (c. 306-373)



- *What are some ways you have found for keeping your heart soft and receptive to the Spirit?*
- *Many worship services around Christmas end with the familiar upbeat song Go Tell it on the Mountain. In what ways can we live out the call of this song? How can we share both the content and the energy of the Christmas message with neighbors?*

Madeleine L'Engle once said, "There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is one of the deepest messages of the incarnation." This is why Richard Foster calls the incarnational tradition the "sacramental life." The fact that in Jesus Christ the Word became flesh renders all of life forever changed. As Foster writes, this tradition "underscores the fact that God is truly among us in the warp and woof of our very earthy existence" (Streams, p. 266). The Christmas hymn "Joy to the World!" affirms that in the incarnation of Jesus Christ the blessing of God is extended "far as the curse is found."



The sacramental life emphasizes the sanctity of every human activity. There is no division between the sacred and the secular. This is why the witness of Jesus Christ is frequently institutionalized. In order to fulfill the cultural mandate to yield all of life to the lordship of Jesus Christ, faithful Christians have established Christian schools, labor unions, health care facilities, and political parties. The incarnational tradition affirms that there is no human endeavor that cannot somehow be done to the glory of God. The challenge of the sacramental life is to see God present and active in the mundane realities of life: our work, hobbies, relationships, sleep, eating habits, and study. In contrast to the trends that either denigrate or worship the human body, the incarnational stream affirms the goodness of the human body. Because God inhabited human flesh, the body is something to be treated with respect, and all human beings treated with dignity.

PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through us, and be so in us, that every soul we come into contact with may feel your presence in our soul. Let them look up and see no longer us but only Jesus! Stay with us, and then we shall begin to shine as you shine; so to share as to be a light to others; the light, O Jesus, will be all from you, none of it will be ours; it will be you, shining on others through us. Let us preach you without preaching, not by words, but by our example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what we do, the evident fullness of the love our hearts bear to you. Amen.

John Henry Newman (1801-1890)



- *The Incarnational Stream has as a primary focus making the Christ within "present and visible" to others. Please share some of the ways you are able to do this at home, work, and play.*
- *C. S. Lewis once had the insight that he should quit being bothered by "interruptions," as if they were preventing him from getting on with his life, and should instead begin to view the interruptions as his life. What do you think he meant? How is this an example of Incarnational living?*
- *Who that you know has inspired you with how he or she lives a "with-God" life?*

Foster calls the evangelical tradition the “Word-centered life”, and the Magi stand out as biblical proponents of this stream for good reason. Theologians often break the concept of the Word of God into three categories: the Word of creation, Scripture, and Jesus Christ. All three come into play in Matthew’s record of the Magi’s visit to Jesus.

- **The Word of Creation:** The star initially leads the Magi from their homeland to Jerusalem. God communicates to these astrologers by means of general revelation in the created order. Creation is a Word from God. It “says” something, as Psalm 19 affirms. In their study of creation, the Magi received revelation from God and responded to it.
- **The Word of Scripture:** God’s revelation in creation says only so much. A greater voice is needed if people are to understand more about who God is. This is where Scripture comes in. Once in Jerusalem, the Magi hear the prophecy of Micah, which indicates more precisely where the birth of Jesus would take place.
- **The Word of Jesus Christ:** God’s revelation culminates in the fullest appearance of the Word—the Word made flesh. This is the final destination for the Magi, and they appropriately worship Jesus, pouring out their gifts before him. In his poem “For the Time Being,” W. H. Auden has the Magi saying, “Oh, here and now our endless journeys tops,” as they kneel before the Christ.



The progress in this pattern is obvious: the Word of Creation brings us to the Word of Scripture, which in turn brings us to the Word of Jesus Christ. The glory of creation and the truth of Scripture are designed to bring us where the Magi went: to Jesus, the greatest revelation of God, and the rightful recipient of the worship of the nations.

PRAYER:

Look upon us, O Lord, and let all the darkness of our souls vanish before the beams of thy brightness. Fill us with holy love, and open to us the treasures of thy wisdom. All our desire is known unto thee, therefore perfect what thou hast begun, and what thy Spirit has awakened us to ask in prayer. We seek thy face, turn thy face unto us and show us thy glory. Then shall our longing be satisfied, and our peace shall be perfect. Amen.

Augustine (354-430)

- *How would you define the “good news” of the gospel?*
- *John Ortberg has said, “it is more important to get the Bible all the way through us than to get ourselves all the way through the Bible”. What are some effective ways you have discovered for getting portions of the Bible all the way through you?*
- *In Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith, Richard J. Foster says, “The work of social justice is more complete when it is intricately connected to authentic evangelical witness.” Do you agree, and what does that statement mean to you?*
- *If outsiders look at your church or small group, do you think they will “in general, like what they see”? If so, how can you keep this going? If not, what can you do personally to become more magnetized with the love of Christ?*

