

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news.*

*Isaiah 61:1a*

We begin our week with Gaudete Sunday, rejoicing in the coming of Christ. Indeed we are on the countdown, and our world is alive with the beauty of this holiday. As a popular tune reminds us, even the stoplights blink red and green. There is a spirit of goodwill among people. We see this reflected in the careful selection of angels chosen from the community angel trees and in the cheerful voices of fellow shoppers. Stories abound of the kindness of strangers to those in need. Amidst the marketing and commercialism of the holiday we can see the coming of Christ, and we rejoice with the world.

And there is also the tension. We get caught up in the decorating, the shopping and the parties. Our senses are bombarded with the sights, the smells, the tastes of the season. The early signs of fatigue begin to creep in, as we can only absorb so much before we are on overload. Thoughts of merely getting through the next few weeks begin to creep in, and we realize that we are just counting down to when it is all over. We begin to lose our focus.

We can also sense the tension in the daily scripture readings, but it is tension of much greater depth. In the readings we hear the questions on the hearts of those preparing to receive the Savior. We feel doubts and confusion, as what is *good news* struggles to take root. Can this really be the longed-for Savior? Is Jesus really who he says he is? These are probably not the questions that occupy our minds as we shop for gifts and bake for the next party.

It would be good, however, to include these questions; not to bring doubt, but to ponder them in our hearts as Mary pondered the news of the angel who appeared to her. Who do we say Christ is? The message of Jesus is all around us in the sights and sounds of the holiday, we need only to stop long enough to allow the question to be formed.