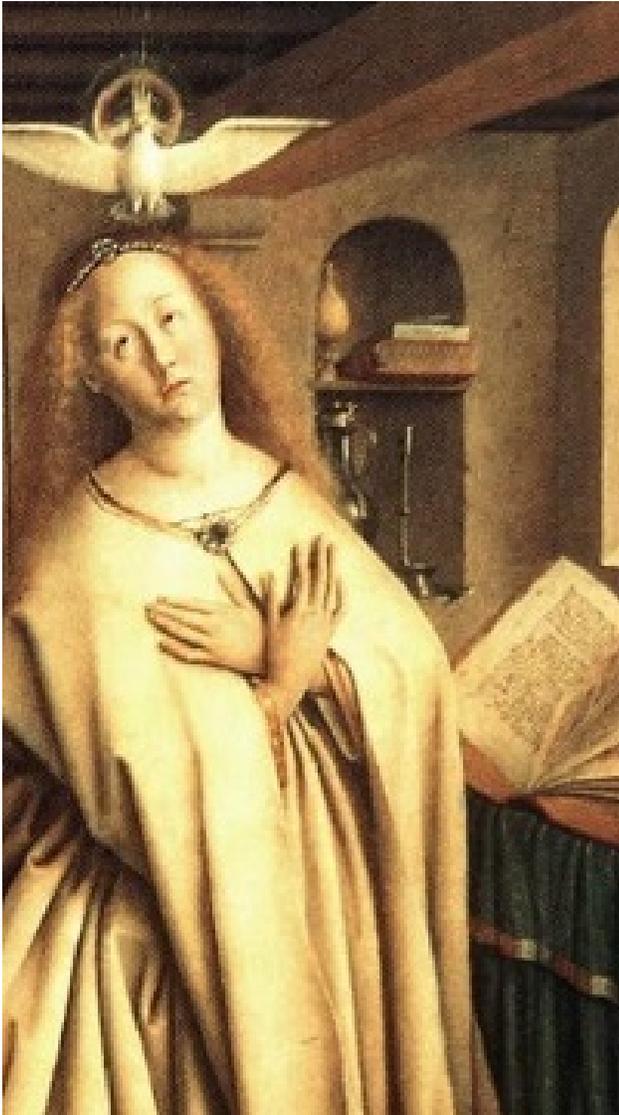


BENCHMARKS



Welcome to the Advent Edition of *BibleWorkbench*! This special edition contains designs for group studies of the lectionary readings extending from the First Sunday of Advent through the First Sunday after Christmas (November 30- December 21). The studies are taken from our regular issue; this limited format is designed for churches and groups that may offer special groups or classes during the Advent season, or who want to get a taste of the *BibleWorkbench* approach before committing to the yearly resources.

WHAT IS BIBLE WORKBENCH?

The *BibleWorkbench* approach is unusual in Bible study, and it may be new to you. We do not ask “what does this text mean?” or “what was the historical setting for this text?” Instead, the process invites you to discover the story in the text and where it is alive in the world around you and in your own inner life.

In this process, Bible study is not a matter of listening to the experts tell you what you should think or believe about the Bible, but rather an invitation to explore for yourself the resonances of the Bible story in your own life, and to share them with others in an open environment.

We call the process *maieutic education*, from the Greek work for “midwife.” Sometimes called the Socratic method, *maieutic education* assumes that learning is a process of helping someone rediscover something they already know. Like a midwife who understands her role as assisting a woman to bring forth the child that has already been growing within her, the *BibleWorkbench* process seeks people to discover their own understandings and connections to the text.

For more about BibleWorkbench and how to use it, see the “What is BibleWorkbench” section in this issue (p. 3).

IN THIS ISSUE

This is our 22nd year of publishing *BibleWorkbench*, and once again we enter into the season of Advent, a season that invites us to look back to ancient longings for wholeness and renewal, to anticipate the hopes and dreams of the future, and to live at “the still point of the turning world,” that T.S. Eliot evokes in his poem “Burnt Norton”:

[...] And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered.
Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the
point, the still point,

There would be no dance, and there is only dance.¹

Many congregations mark these Sundays with the lighting of candles in the Advent wreath, balancing the dark days of winter with the promise of a coming spring. That balancing point of darkness and light carries the potential for something new being born within each of us, unfolding in its own time.

We begin Cycle B of the lectionary, the set of readings for the year that center this time on the gospel of Mark. Because Mark's gospel contains no stories of Jesus' birth, the lectionary draws on Luke and John for further readings during this season.

We begin our journey not with the beginning of Mark, but toward the end, with the "little apocalypse" of Mark 13. When something begins, something else must come to an end; the old must pass away before things can become new. The first Sunday of Advent is always a reminder to stay awake and ready in times of transition and disruption.

As the weeks unfold, you will be invited to imagine yourselves in the wilderness with John the Baptist, waiting with him for "*the one whom you do not know.*" You will hear the familiar Christmas story, and be invited to *be perplexed*

with Mary of Galilee and ponder the virginal in your own depths. You will sit with a small group in a house somewhere in Galatia, called to become not a slave, but a child and an heir.

This Advent issue also includes a reflection on *maieutic education* as it relates to preaching. See "The Preacher as Midwife" (p. 34) for more detail and an example of a sermon from *BibleWorkbench* founder Bill Dols.

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Please also check out the Educational Center website at www.educationalcenter.org. You will find resource materials that can help, including the *BibleWorkbench Leader Guide*, the *BibleWorkbench Guidelines*, a cumulative bibliography and links to items mentioned in the Sunday sessions.

May this Advent season see something new born in every one of us. Welcome to the journey!

Grace and Peace,



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A weekend seminar at the Four Springs retreat center in Middletown, California, some thirty years ago introduced the Rev. D. Andrew (Andy) Kille to a new and transformational engagement with the Gospels. From that weekend, the path took him to the Graduate Theological Union, where he earned an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in psychology and the Bible, and eventually to BibleWorkbench. He was named to follow Founding Editor Bill Dols in 2008. Ordained in the American Baptist tradition, Andy has been a pastor, teacher, facilitator, and spiritual director. He has worked collaboratively in both ecumenical and interfaith contexts, and currently serves as Chair of the Silicon Valley Interreligious Council (SiVIC). Andy is author of *Psychological Biblical Criticism*, and co-editor of *Psychological Insight into the Bible* and *A Cry Instead of Justice*. He lives in San Jose, California, with his wife Pamela, a clinical psychologist.

¹ T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," from *The Four Quartets* (1943).