"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Luke 3:16)

John the Baptist appears in two out of four Sundays in the Revised Common Lectionary for Advent - seemingly, his sharp witness cannot be avoided on the way to Christmas. I’ve always been curious about Luke’s addition of fire to John’s proclamation of Jesus’ baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Fire was an important part of our conversations at the retreat we enjoyed together a month ago. Jessie’s dramatic photos of the enormous wood-fueled kiln at St. John’s during a firing showed the all-out effort and dedication of a whole community that is needed to tend the intense fire necessary for the shaped clay to assume its final, stable form as cups and bowls and teapots. Several of you commented on the wisdom inherent in Richard Bresnahan’s description of the natural limits of the firing process:

- ten days is the limit of the human energy to keep the fire going strong and safely;
- an every-other-year firing is the limit of the wood the land can produce for fuel.

As congregational leaders, lay and ordained, you have all been fueling your congregations with hopefulness, creative ways of connecting with one another during the pandemic, new ways of doing ministry, space for self-reflection and action on racial injustice. And there is no clear gauge for your natural limits, no one to tell you that it’s okay to stop now.

Many of our congregations observe the practice of lighting candles on a wreath each week of Advent. Whether or not that is your own practice, our hope for you this Advent is that you may find some moments to light a candle (maybe your Collegeville candle?), to breathe deeply, and to allow the Spirit to rekindle the fire of your callings in life and work.

O Emmanuel, in the Incarnation you became one of us: a son, a friend, a light for the world. May your Spirit tend the fires of my callings and the callings of all in my congregation, rekindle us in moments of weariness, stoke the flames of faith within us. During these dark days, may the fire of our callings and the flame of this candle shine as beacons of Advent hope. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

www.communitiesofcalling.org
You may also enjoy praying with these short O Antiphon videos performed by the monks of the Saint John’s Abbey Schola. The ancient O Antiphons call on Christ to “come!” in the days leading up to Christmas. Drawing on Old Testament imagery, the O Antiphons address Christ by a different title each day:

- **December 17 - O Holy Wisdom**
- **December 18 - O Adonai**
- **December 19 - O Root of Jesse**
- **December 20 - O Key of David**
- **December 21 - O Rising Sun**
- **December 22 - O King of Nations**
- **December 23 - O Emmanuel**