

ADVENT REFLECTION – WEEK ONE: HOPE

God by calling you has joined you to His Son, Jesus Christ, and God is faithful. 1 Corinthians 1:9

WAITING AND WATCHING

Advent is about two comings. It's about waiting and watching for the coming of the Christ child – new life, new birth, new hope coming into our world and into our lives. It is the fulfilment of God's promises. But it's also about waiting and watching for the end times when the fullness of God's kingdom will be revealed. Both these advents signify the coming together of humanity and divinity.

Advent is a time when the Church stands up in the face of the busyness of life and asks us to slow down, be still, and be quiet. We are to keep awake, looking and listening for the God who is always coming to us. We are called to prepare the way of the Lord. We watch and reflect on who we are. We live with expectancy and anticipation of God's presence in our lives. We wait for the angelic messenger that promises us that the womb of our humanity will bear a child named Jesus.

Advent reminds us that waiting and watching are holy work. So how do we do this? Silence is the key. Silence is a way of waiting, a way of watching, and a way of listening to what is going on within and around us. We come to self-knowledge through stillness and silence, through attentiveness and watchfulness.

© **Michael K Marsh** *Interrupting the Silence*

SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN

In our busy, stressful world, we have to seek out silence and stillness consciously. God speaks in all sorts of ways – through scripture, through nature, through other people. However, unless we slow down and listen, we miss his promptings and his voice. Only then can we truly appreciate the value of the journey, as well as the destination; the value of slowing down, looking and listening; learning from the rhythms of nature; from the formation of community along the way, and from times of stillness and rest.

So often we rush through life at breakneck speed, never pausing to reflect and be still. It is only when we slow down and look that we really see. By slowing down, and being more present to each moment, all sorts of lessons are learned. For some, this might involve the healing of painful memories. For others, it could be time to discern the next stage in life. For many, it is a chance to really get away and listen to God. For me, it is an invitation to a whole way of being – one that recognises that God is not 'out there' to be sought, but already 'in here' to be found.

Annie O'Connor *The Camino: Finding Stillness and Presence*, 2019

THE ECLIPSE

I stood out in the open cold to see the essence of the eclipse which was its perfect darkness. I stood in the cold on the porch and could not think of anything so perfect as man's hope of light in the face of darkness.

Richard Eberhart

IT IS ENOUGH TO LISTEN TO THE SILENCE

It is enough to listen to the silence.
Silence comes to fetch us where we have just been with our thoughts and feelings.

It is enough to listen to the silence.
Silence brings us to where we are now, right here, into this room, to this place, this morning.

It is enough to listen to the silence.
Silence embraces what wants to become.
Whatever this day brings us, is held,
and always has been, in this silence now.
It is enough to listen to the silence.

Silvia Ostertag *Living Silence*

A SEASON OF ANTICIPATION AND SURPRISES

Advent is a season of anticipation, of holy waiting. It is a waiting characterized not by idleness or even contented peace, but by prophetic yielded-ness and active hope. Perhaps more than any other season in the Christian calendar, Advent acknowledges the already-and-not-yet nature of the Kingdom of God. In remembering the anticipation of Christ's first coming, we acknowledge and nurture our anticipation of Christ's second coming.

Advent is a season for the prophets, for the dreamers, for the poets. A great light has shown, but there is still so much darkness to pierce, so much gloom to overcome. Advent is a season of surprises too, of God showing up when and where we least expect Emmanuel: in a womb, in a barn, at a homeless shelter, at that church service you resisted attending, in that family member with whom you disagree, in every corner of this world, to your kitchen. It is a season to slow down and pay attention, to listen to the prophets, to look for God in his many disguises.

Rachel Held Evans

THE IN-BETWEEN TIMES

Advent is about the in-between times and Advent is where God will meet us. We have on one hand, a world in disarray and it doesn't seem like there is much hope. On the other hand, we have a vision of something better.

That's the struggle of Advent. A new born baby in a stable announcing: 'Peace on earth' or a man on a cross crying: 'Forgive them, Father'. It is a bridge. The Jesus who does not solve all the problems or remove all the pain and suffering, but who says that fear can be met with faith and that history and hope do rhyme.

ADVENT REFLECTION – WEEK TWO: PEACE

He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms. Isaiah 40:10

THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

Advent is a season of waiting. The leaves have all fallen; the weather is cold, the trees are barren. It is a good time to remember the Holy Spirit moving across the waters at the moment of creation, being breathed into Adam's inert clay, coming upon Mary in Nazareth, entering our own lives in conception and baptism. We are all called to conceive God's Child in this world; this is our vocation as Christians. May we all find strength in the memories of those who have come before us, and in the companionship of those with us, offering us, in this time of waiting, the taste of liberation made possible in the birth of a child.

Sabra McKenzie-Hamilton *Catholic Worker* December 1996

A NEW HOPE

Advent invites new hope for a world in despair, light for a world in darkness, and peace for a world at war. It calls us to prepare anew for the coming of the God of peace and God's reign of peace on earth. May this holy season, give us new hope and inspire us to show ourselves to be "children of God" seeking to make peace in the workplace, in the community, in our homes, and in the world.

Heather Kiernan

HOLY PAUSING

In the monastic tradition, *statio* is the practice of stopping one thing before beginning another, acknowledging that in the space of transition and threshold is a sacred dimension, a holy pause full of possibility. This place between is a place of stillness, where we let go of what came before and prepare ourselves to enter fully into what comes next. When we pause between activities or spaces or moments in our days, we open ourselves to the possibility of discovering a new kind of presence to the darkness of in-between times. When we rush from one thing to another, we skim over the surface of life, losing the sacred attentiveness that brings forth revelations in the most ordinary of moments.

Statio calls us to a sense of reverence for slowness, for mindfulness, and for the fertile dark spaces between our goals where we can pause and centre ourselves, and listen. We can open up a space within for God to work. We can find thresholds, physical places of transition, in our everyday lives, and we can use them for our spiritual practice. In the days ahead, become aware of all the times you cross a threshold. This might be moving from one space to another — entering through a doorway, transitioning from one activity to the next, or tending the thresholds of the day, especially at dawn and dusk. Pause at each one and offer a short blessing, simply becoming aware of the possibilities alive in the moment. See if the threshold helps call forth the thinness of this moment, making the voice of the divine more accessible.

Christine Valters Paintner *The Soul's Slow Ripening: 12 Celtic Practices for Seeking the Sacred*

BLESSING THE DOOR

First let us say a blessing upon all who have entered here before us.

You can see the sign of their passage by the worn place on the doorframe as they walked through, the smooth sill of the threshold where they crossed.

Press your ear to the door for a moment before you enter and you will hear their voices murmuring words you cannot quite make out but know are full of welcome.

On the other side these ones who wait — for you, if you do not know by now — understand what a blessing can do how it appears like nothing you expected; how it arrives as visitor, outrageous invitation, child; how it takes the form of angel or dream; how it comes in words like '*How can this be?*' and '*lifted up the lowly*'; how it sounds like '*in the wilderness prepare the way*'.

Those who wait for you know how the mark of a true blessing is that it will take you where you did not think to go.

Once through this door there will be more: more doors, more blessings, more who watch and wait for you, but here at this door of beginning the blessings cannot be said without you. So lay your palm against the frame that those before you touched, place your feet where others paused in this entryway. Say the thing that you most need and the door will open wide. And by this word the door is blessed and by this word the blessing is begun from which door by door all the rest will come.

Jan Richardson *Through the Advent Door: Entering a Contemplative Christmas*

SOWING SEEDS OF LOVE AND PEACE

Did I offer peace today?
Did I bring a smile to someone's face?
Did I say words of healing?
Did I let go of my anger and resentment?
Did I forgive?
Did I love?

These are the real questions.

I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will be many fruits, here in this world and the life to come.

Henri Nouwen

ADVENT REFLECTION – WEEK THREE: JOY

I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. Isaiah 61:10

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

In recent weeks I've been reflecting on how Jesus' coming into the world teaches us about presence, and how Jesus is the presence of the Father, God-with-us.

One of the Hebrew words translated as '*presence*' in the Old Testament is '*paniym*', which can also be translated as '*face*'. I love this, because it reveals something of the nearness of God's presence and the close, personal encounter we can have with God face-to-face. As Psalm 67:1 tells us, to experience God's presence is to experience the light in God's shining face.

'*Present*' is one of those wonderfully rich words that can have all sorts of meanings. When we think of Christmas presents, we think of gifts; Jesus certainly is the self-gift of the Father to the world. But to be present also means to be here, to be near, to turn up, to exist in this moment, now, to be accessible. Isn't it wonderful that Jesus' coming means all these things as well?

When I look at Jesus' life and ministry, I'm struck by how totally present he was to everyone and in everything. Whether in prayer to the Father, in conversation with the people he encountered, in proclaiming the kingdom, in ministering to people's needs, in listening to their concerns, in suffering, in dying and in rising, Jesus was fully present in each particular moment.

I wonder if this Christmas we can practise being fully present in this particular moment, to these particular people in this particular place, without thinking of what comes next? Can we accept this moment as a gift from God, to be lived to the full?

Annie O'Connor Church Army, 2018

PRAYER

In times of despair,
we seek comfort in your presence.
We wait in hope for you.

Come, Lord, source of joy.
Move us to be good news in our world
and to stand alongside
our sisters and brothers in need.

Come, Lord, source of joy.
Lead us in your ways
as together we make a change
so all people may rejoice and be glad.
Come, Lord, source of joy.

CAFOD Advent prayers

REFLECTION

Jesus is born into poverty – into a poor family seeking refuge. The well-known imagery of the cosy straw and the welcoming animals of our nativity scenes show the joy of the Holy Family in the birth of a precious child.

But maybe those images gloss over the reality of the situation, hiding the fear of the family and the discomfort, the smells, the unpleasantness of giving birth in an animal shed.

Do we also gloss over that line of bringing Good News to the poor? This coming year, could we spend some more time working out what that could mean to our parish?

CAFOD

SEEKING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness,
send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for
Christmas.

We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces
to hear your voice each day.
We who are anxious over many things
look forward to your coming among us.
We who are blessed in so many ways
long for the complete joy of your kingdom.
We whose hearts are heavy
seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness,
yet seeking the light.
To you we say, 'Come Lord Jesus!'

Henri Nouwen

CHOOSE JOY

Joy is essential to the spiritual life. Whatever we may think of or say about God, when we are not joyful, our thoughts and words cannot bear fruit. Jesus reveals to us God's love so that his joy may become ours and that our joy may become complete.

Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing — sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death — can take that love away. Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God's love for us.

Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us.

Henri Nouwen

ADVENT REFLECTION – WEEK FOUR: LOVE

"I am the handmaid of the Lord," said Mary, "let what you have said be done to me." Luke 1:38

BE AWAKE

The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus* meaning arrival, "coming." But if God has already come to us, what are we waiting for? If God has already become incarnate in Jesus, what are we waiting for? I think we're called to awaken to what's already in our midst. Advent is a coming to a new consciousness of God, already loving us into something new, into something more whole. We can think of Advent as God waiting for us to wake up!

Consider this: what if we are in the manger and God is already awakened in our midst and we're so fallen asleep, so unconsciously asleep that God is looking for "someone to get up and help bring the gifts into the world?" Let's awaken to what God is doing in us and what God is seeking to become in us.

Sr Ilia Delio *Moving Onwards Forward: An Advent message*

WE ARE CALLED TO BRING GOOD NEWS

John the Baptist was an evangelist. Many thought that he was the promised Messiah but his mission was only to announce the Good News, preparing the way for Jesus' coming.

I wonder how we might answer the question 'who is an evangelist?' – in a way that word tells us a little more... Let's start with some Greek! We get the English word *evangelist* from the Greek noun *euangelistes*, which means 'bringer of good tidings,' or 'announcer of good news.' You might spot the word *angel* in the middle of the English and the Greek, and you'd be right to make this connection.

An angel is a messenger and the message is good; (*eu* is the Greek word for 'good'). So, the evangelist is one who, like the angels, brings a message of good news from God. And I think we can understand something of the evangelist's message by looking at the message of the angels in the New Testament.

What is their message? Nothing less than the infinite God of love come down, God-with-us, peace on earth, joy to all, reconciliation, new life. There is a broad sense, then, in which all Christians are called to be evangelists. We are all called to speak, live and act in ways that bring this good news of God-with-us to those we meet. We are all messengers of glad tidings.

Annie O'Connor Church Army, October 2019

THE EYES OF LOVE

It is only with the eyes of love that we'll see His coming
.... Love is our awareness of God's coming in someone else.

Ralph Morton *Growing Hope*

GOD OUR HOPE AND OUR DESIRE

God our hope and our desire, we wait for your coming
as a woman longs for the birth, the exile for her home, the lover
for the touch of his beloved, and the humble poor for justice.

Janet Morley

LET YOUR GOD LOVE YOU

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone, empty before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God Look upon you.
That is all.
God knows and understands.
God loves you with an enormous love,
wanting only to look upon you with love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.
Let your God Love you.

Edwina Gateley from *There Was No Path
So I Trod One*

THE SILENCE OF LOVE

Be still and know.
Be still and look.
Let the eyes of the mind be closed
that you may hear what otherwise
you would not hear, that you may know
what otherwise you would not know.

Abandon yourself to God in longing love,
simply, holding on to nothing but God.
So you may enter the silence of eternity
and know the union of yourself with God.

And if in the silence God does not
answer, God is still there.
God's silence is the silence of love.
Wait then in patience and in submission.
It is good to wait in silence for God's
coming.

Author unknown

THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are
home,
When the shepherds are back with their
flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace amongst people,
To make music in the heart.



Howard Thurman