

Advent 2024

Awaiting Hope



GOD OF WAITING

God of birth, we watch in fear for your coming;
scared of the pain and risk, the struggle of new life emerging
and our own capacity to bear it.

God of waiting,

WAIT WITH US.

God of the future, we watch in hope for your coming;
anticipating an unknown future,
uncertain of the unnamed reality,
not sure of the form it will take.

God of waiting,

WAIT WITH US.

God of celebration,
we watch in joy for your coming;
expectant with promises of freedom, eager for new possibilities,
delighting in the gift of birth.

God of waiting,

WAIT WITH US.

- Jan Berry



Introduction

During the Advent season we patiently wait reflecting on what is to come, that being HOPE!

Hope can be defined in different ways, a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen, grounds for believing that something good may happen or a feeling of trust. As a noun, hope can mean an aspiration, desire, wish, expectation, ambition, aim, plan, dream, longing, yearning, craving and as a verb hope can mean to expect, anticipate, look for, wait for, be hopeful of, want, wish for, dream of. Everyone knows what it is to hope.

We can know things. The Greek word *Ginosko* which is most often translated as “know” or “known” is a word that means so much more than that. In English the best way to translate it would probably be to personally, intimately, and experientially know something.

When we consider Christmas, we’re not just talking about waiting for the baby Jesus to be born, we know that happened 2,000 years ago. We are welcoming the Christ that is forever being born in the human soul and into history. Jesus took flesh in his birth, he was born the same way as you and I, His birth reveals his earthly existence and brings all humans into a common family, this we know. But what we yearn for is a knowing that is in the heart of each person, a hope that dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. “Hope does not disappoint, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:1-2.5).

This interplay of hope and waiting makes us see clearly that the Christian life is a journey calling for moments of greater intensity to encourage and sustain hope as the constant companion that guides our steps towards the goal of our encounter with the Lord Jesus.

This year as we prepare ourselves for the new liturgical year and season of Advent, we also prepare ourselves for what is to come in the 2025 Jubilee Year, Pilgrims of Hope.

Pope Francis writes:

“In our fast-paced world, we are used to wanting everything now. We no longer have time simply to be with others; even families find it hard to get together and enjoy one another’s company. Patience has been put to flight by frenetic haste, and this has proved detrimental, since it leads to impatience, anxiety and even gratuitous violence, resulting in more unhappiness and self-centredness.

Nor is there much place for patience in this age of the Internet, as space and time yield to an ever present “now”. Were we still able to contemplate creation with a sense of awe, we might better understand the importance of patience.”

This Advent let us make room as we await with hope. May the power of hope fill our days, as we await with confidence the coming of Jesus. Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it so it becomes more than just words but a fully lived experience.

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Mystagogical Reflection - Dwelling with God in the Sunday Gospel

Invitation

The person guiding the group invites people into the process based on the following invitation.

Listen to God say to you ... *Be still and know that I am God* (Ps 46:10)

Moved by the Holy Spirit in response we pray ...

Open my/our ears to the Word of God ...

Open my/our heart(s) to the love of God ...

Open my/our mind(s) to the wisdom of God ...

Let us listen for the words of everlasting life ...

Each step finishes in silence before the guide invites the group into the next step ...

1. Encounter with Christ in the Word proclaimed ... listen ...

2. Recollection: What happened?

An invitation to recall what happened in the text. The detail is important – characters, scenery, actions. No interpretation, just what happened.

3. Reflection: What word or phrase captures your attention? What did you experience/feel? What is God revealing to you? How is this relevant to your life?

An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter and to share what you notice.

4. Faith sharing: How is the meaning found in your encounter with Christ in the scripture connecting with the season of Advent?

An invitation to connect your experience and the meaning you have found in it, with what Christ is revealing in the living tradition of our Catholic faith.

5. Connection: Why does what Christ is revealing matter to us now? What's happening in our world and neighbourhood right now?

An invitation to explore the essential connection between liturgy, faith and life.

6. Conversion: How is your encounter with Christ inviting you to change – to become more and more Christ like?

What is dying? What is being raised up?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God. Conclude your gathering with the blessing.



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Contemplation is not a technique to be mastered
but a journey inside ourselves
to become one with what already is.”

– *Daniel O’Leary*



**Advent Gospels
& Reflections**



First Sunday of Advent (1 December)

Gospel (Luke 21:25-28. 34-36)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.

'Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.'

Blessing

We seek God's ways;

may we walk in God's truth.

We seek God's friendship;

may we live in God's justice.

We trust in God's promises;

may we delight in God's love.

May the God of pilgrimage,

Maker, Traveller, Spirit of adventure and joy,

bless us and encourage us all the days of

our journey home.

AMEN



First Sunday of Advent (1 December)

Reflection by Fr Michael Tate

The Coming of our Saviour

Sometimes our own lives, the life of the Church, the life of societies and nations cry out for Our Lord Jesus Christ to come again right now and rescue us right now.

In some instances we can become conscious of Jesus' saving, transforming power in a particular situation. But, for the whole of humanity across the millennia, we do not know the day or the hour when death and all its warriors such as disease and violence, will be absolutely vanquished by Christ in glory.

This can lead to a type of pain which finds solace in all those things which dull the spirit. Our Lord gives examples: debauchery, drunkenness. Today he might have added 'living in the virtual world'. Rather, Our Lord wants us to live in the real world on high alert.

In the meantime each one of us can be a signal of what is to come. Each time we exhaust ourselves heroically loving someone whom others might abandon, each time we take a risk because we cry out against injustice, and in a myriad other ways, we signal that the Kingdom is already being established on earth.

We could pause for a moment to pray for the strength to be on high alert for the opportunities to translate the legacy of Jesus into our own time and place, thus giving reasons to each other for our faith and hope that Christ has come, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.



Second Sunday of Advent (8 December)

Gospel (Luke 3:1-6)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries in the wilderness;

Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

Every valley will be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low,
winding ways will be straightened
and rough roads made smooth.

And all mankind shall see the salvation of God.

Blessing

God have mercy on your people,
baptise us in wisdom
and clothe us in integrity;
wrap us in the beauty of your love.
And may the God of mercy bless us,
Deliverer, Lover and Breath of life.

AMEN



Second Sunday of Advent (8 December)

Reflection by Fr Michael Tate

We are John the Baptists

Do we have to be like John the Baptist, eccentrically dressed and scavenging for food, to prepare the way of the Lord? No. You and I are called to be a John or Joan the Baptist, preparing people's hearts in our own time and place.

But we have to allow God to prepare our hearts for this role. John the Baptist challenges us to 'Repent', i.e. to turn around our own lives seeking God's forgiveness. John then challenges us to see the big picture which is that 'All who live shall see the salvation of God'.

Pope Francis is the exemplary universal pastor inspiring us to become 'les mercifuls sans frontieres'. And young people through social media are already saying 'We are one community of human beings on this fragile planet'.

The challenge for most of us is more immediate and apparently of smaller scope. The challenge this Advent is to identify the one person whose heart you can help prepare to celebrate the coming of the Lord Jesus in three weeks' time. The best method is to let that person see your faith and joy centred on that little Jewish baby lying in a manger.

Do that, and who knows what may happen because that little baby is in fact the Sovereign Lord of history and of the whole cosmos. With God's grace, you don't have to be as eccentric or bizarre as John the Baptist to play your part in changing the course of history!

We could take a moment to pray that, repenting of our own sins where necessary, we may prepare the heart of at least one person so that the Lord Jesus may enter in this Christmas, helping him fulfil his mission that all who live shall see the salvation of God.



Third Sunday of Advent (15 December)

Gospel (Luke 3:10-18)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

When all the people asked John, 'What must we do?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.' There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate.' Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!'

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

Blessing

We know that God wants us to be happy.

May we enjoy God's love gladly and with great hope.

We know that God wants us to be holy.

May we drink of God's love deeply and with great joy.

God of the Dance, Storyteller, Joy of our joy,

bless us with laughter and glory in all the light and darkness of our days.

AMEN



Third Sunday of Advent (15 December)

Reflection by Fr Michael Tate

I want you to be happy

Some people have an image of God who must be obeyed out of fear. Rules of behaviour are kept as part of a deal to avoid punishment. But St Paul was imitating God when he told the Philippians that all he wanted was their 'happiness'. God's deepest desire is that we share divine bliss. St Thomas Aquinas tells us that the goal of human life is this beatific happiness.

Of course, there is a way of life which responds to the Divine Lover. John the Baptist insists on rules of social justice, particularly those which forbid taking advantage of the vulnerable. But these are the minimum. He envisages a response of extravagant generosity. It will take Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Fire to make this possible.

This was effected by the One foretold by John. He doesn't name him, but we know it was Jesus of Nazareth who had the power to unleash such over-the-top generosity. Jesus sent his Holy Spirit at Pentecost as if in wind and fire. This created a new community which, the Acts of Apostles tells us, responded with acts of unrestrained generosity to the vulnerable and needy.

We might pause for a moment to pray for a generous spirit responding in gratitude to the Divine Lover who, as Risen Lord, has the power and will to enable us to be filled with Divine Bliss.



Fourth Sunday of Advent (22 December)

Gospel (Luke 1:39-45)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

Blessing

Let your face shine on us and bless us;

God of Hosts, Maker, Saviour and Holy Spirit,

root your justice in us all our days.

AMEN



Fourth Sunday of Advent (22 December)

Reflection by Fr Michael Tate

Life in the Womb

This little gospel story tells us that ‘the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leaped’ and not merely leaped, but leaped ‘for joy’. Is this just poetic hyperbole?

We know that beautiful music can have a wonderful effect on life in the womb. Good vibrations. Here, the presence of Jesus, being carried by Mary in her pregnancy, had a wonderful effect on the life carried by Elizabeth. Very good vibrations.

From the moment of the conception of Jesus, good vibrations reverberated out to all human beings. The good news is that you and I and every human life ever conceived is visited by Our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, and we receive that visit as Original Blessing.

There is a further and consoling truth. Every mother or father who has lost a baby too early needs to know that the same extraordinary sense of Our Lord’s presence was felt by your baby. That Divine Presence conferred a powerful Original Blessing on that little life within the womb, and that same Presence accompanied your baby into the everlasting embrace of Divine Love in Heaven.

We could pause a moment to pray using the very words of Elizabeth, reciting:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

Blessed art thou among women,

and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners

now and at the hour of our death. Amen.



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