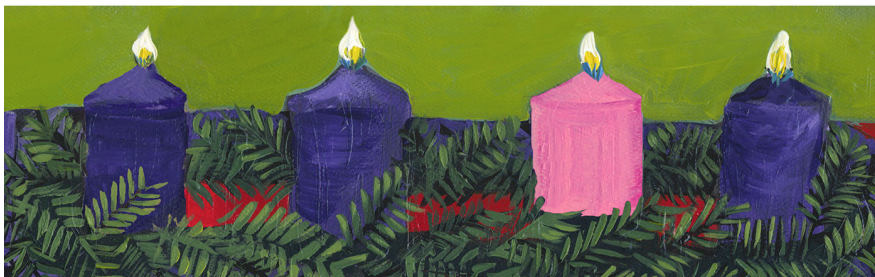


Advent: A Time to Offer Hope

Kathy Kuczka

This year, the Fourth Sunday of Advent falls on Christmas Eve, which means that the Advent season will be as short as possible, only twenty-one days.

Still, Advent reminds us to take the long view, to slow down, to savor the moment, and to embrace the journey. Even though this Advent is short, the following suggestions may lengthen the impact of the season.



When the days of waiting during Advent are embraced, anxiety is transformed into joyful expectation.

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN SCRIPTURE

Advent ushers in a new liturgical year, and that means a new set of readings from the lectionary. This year the Church proclaims the readings from year B, which means that the Gospel will usually be from the evangelist Mark. Though the Gospel according to Mark is the second book of the New Testament, Scripture scholars believe that it is the oldest of all the Gospel narratives. It was believed to have been written around AD 65—fifteen years before Matthew’s Gospel account and twenty years before Luke’s Gospel account. Both Matthew and Luke are believed to have used Mark’s Gospel as a source for their narratives.

Mark wrote at a time when believers were experiencing hardship and persecution for their Christian faith. Fearing for their lives, they questioned the need to die for their belief in Jesus. Mark’s Gospel account, with its emphasis on a suffering Jesus, is his response. Mark taught his community that, although Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus experienced rejection and persecution but through it all remained faithful to God—accepting the inevitability of the cross.

- Read the entire Gospel of Mark. It’s the shortest of the Gospels and can be read in one sitting.
- Go back and reread it, taking the time to reflect on the stories that touch you the most.
- Make a special effort to pray daily for those who, like Jesus, experience rejection and persecution.

EMBRACE THE WAITING

Everyone is waiting for something, whether it’s a new job, a new relationship, or simply for the sun to come out. Waiting is hard, which is why we tend to resist it at every turn. We tend to drive the fastest route or to stand in the shortest line.

Advent teaches us that it is okay to wait. In fact, it may be preferable in the long run. Scriptures proclaimed during Advent are filled with images of what happens when we wait in hope: a desert blooms, a wolf befriends a lamb, and the poor finally have their day. And after years of waiting for the promised Messiah, good news abounds as the angel Gabriel tells Mary: “And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month for her she who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God” (Luke 1:36–37).

Read and reflect on the stories of those whom we encounter during the Advent season and whose experience of waiting is portrayed in Scripture: Isaiah (Isaiah 40); Mary, the Mother of God (Luke 1:26–56); and John the Baptist (Mark 1:1–11).

Ask yourself how their experience of waiting relates to yours. Consider those who wait, and reach out to them in solidarity:

- Call someone enduring an illness.
- Begin a pen-pal relationship with someone in prison.
- Visit someone in a nursing home.
- Send a note of encouragement to someone riding out a challenging time in their life.

God waits patiently, longingly, lovingly for us. So too, we are called to await God’s presence and favor. When we welcome our waiting, the anxiety and restlessness are transformed into joyful expectation. Advent teaches us that our days are pregnant with hope. So savor Advent.

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