



FROM THE CHAPLAIN'S DESK

ADVENT IS HERE, AGAIN.

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Happy New Year! It might sound silly to say this right now. In the Catholic calendar, we are on the threshold of one year ending and a new one beginning. We are starting the cycle all over and here we are, in Advent again.

It's difficult to keep these liturgical "events" fresh in our minds and hearts as we live these events year in and year out. These events are the familiar sign posts telling us we are passing through time and the natural seasons. After a while, they can become stale, offering little for us, or so we think. How can we keep these events fresh and new?

Advent's themes are hope, peace, joy and love. Advent is associated with "holy waiting." This is a hard sell, since we don't like waiting. We stream, we binge watch, we go to drive thru windows at all hours of the day and night, we sign up for Amazon Prime so our orders get here the next day or soon thereafter...waiting does not come easily for us. Yet, in Advent we are told there is a holiness to this waiting. What were the people waiting for exactly in those stories from the Bible?

"For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low..." (Baruch 5.7--9) "Look, the virgin is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel..." (Isaiah 7.14)

"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE
WORD, AND THE WORD WAS
WITH GOD, AND THE WORD
WAS GOD. HE WAS IN THE
BEGINNING WITH GOD. ALL
THINGS CAME INTO BEING
THROUGH HIM, AND WITHOUT
HIM NOT ONE THING CAME
INTO BEING. WHAT HAS COME
INTO BEING IN HIM WAS LIFE,
[A] AND THE LIFE WAS THE
LIGHT OF ALL PEOPLE. THE
LIGHT SHINES IN THE
DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS
DID NOT OVERCOME IT."
(JOHN 1.1-5)

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light..." (Isaiah 9.2) These are all too familiar; we've heard these many times before and we assume we know the meaning and the context behind these passages. I suggest that we need to awaken, or reawaken, our imaginations. That very first Christmas is an event that has changed everything for us.

I think it's safe to say that we struggle with being human: loving people is difficult, sometimes we get our hearts broken, people betray us, we betray them (intentionally or unintentionally), we experience grief and loss, we receive diagnoses we do not want, our health, both physical and mental, can be fragile and not guaranteed...the list goes on and on. Then, Advent comes along with this "holy waiting" and we react strongly to being told to wait; for what, we aren't really sure. We have all been waiting for others to love us, to be recognized for what we bring to our classrooms and work places. We are waiting for the wrongs to be righted by the very people who hurt us in the first place. For all of us who have been waiting like this, Advent is *for us*. The promise of Christmas is *for us*!

This man we call Jesus, who is the Son of God, is the game changer, a new chapter, a new reality for life. Period. God saw all the pain and suffering that was happening to humanity and in humanity, and God was so moved to show us what love really is. So, God decided to enter human history and join us in our living. But God doesn't just join us in our nature, God, in Jesus, shows us exactly what it is to be human. Jesus is the perfect version of ourselves.



From the moment of his conception, Jesus is made vulnerable and humble, and it is in this vulnerability and humility where we can meet him. As much as we do not want to admit it, at our very core we too are vulnerable. We disguise and hide this truth by distracting ourselves with so many things. Yet, these will never satisfy the longing in our hearts for what we are truly looking for: unconditional love, acceptance, forgiveness, hope, faith, peace. These can be found in a small baby in a manger on a night long, long ago.

It takes deep courage to be vulnerable and humbled by poverty, whether we choose this or not. Yet, God has chosen these avenues to show God's strength and the power of divine presence. God never reneges on God's word. So, to light up our imaginations so these events can offer us something new, we need to declutter from our hearts the skepticism, cynicism, and wounds of past or current hurts, and dare to believe that this God who showed up as a tiny human baby is the same God who led this human to heal the hurting, cure the sick, feed the hungry and bring the dead back to life. This God who created the universe and everything in it is the same God who died on a cross and then three days later resurrected, conquering death forever. Daring to believe makes us vulnerable, and we are filled with fear that we will believe in vain. When we are scared to believe, or hope, let us remember that peace is the first thing the angels sang on that night so long ago when a tiny baby was born, a baby named Emmanuel, who grew up showing us how to be human and who prepares a place for us on the other side of this life. Alleluia!

