

# Making Ready for the Advent of God

*“Like an unborn child, the life of God grows unseen yet profoundly felt. Insistently pushing and prodding us, enlarging the contours of our lives and our hearts, as intimate to us as our own breathing, yet utterly other, the divine presence waits to be born.”* (Wendy Wright, *The Vigil: Keeping Watch in the Season of Christ’s Coming*)

Imagine for a moment that it is the morning of Wednesday, December 24, 2008. The season of Advent is about to flower into the season of Christmas.

How did you spend Advent this year?

Looking back, somewhere along the way did the weeks turn into a blur of busyness, partying, over-consumption, and stress? Did the meaning disappear under a tidal wave of expectations, yours and those of others? Did depression or loneliness make an uninvited appearance? Are you relieved it’s all about to be “over?”

Or, in the lengthening darkness, do you find that your heart has been strengthened? Were you able to participate with God in living into hope – hope for yourself, your loved ones, the world? Are you ready for the Christmas season to begin, ready for this unimaginable birth?

“The birth of Christ,” Sr. Wendy Beckett observes, “can seem utterly removed from the everyday reality of our own life, elevated into a sacred sphere where all is peace and joy. Not so: Mary is living in a real world . . . .”

We too are living in a real world, with real demands and challenges. How can we open ourselves, as Mary did, in our real lives, to the Advent of God? How can we become more like her, “the bold virgin with a heart in love with God who makes a sanctuary of her life?” (Loretta Ross-Gotta). How can we make a sanctuary of our life this Advent?

It is not easy to keep Advent. The commercial culture in which we live jumps directly – sometime in mid-October – into its own glittering version of the Christmas season. A time of waiting, of keeping watch in the darkness, of being still, is nowhere to be seen. But then again, the culture is not waiting for God.

The good news for us is that we have time to make some choices, to be deliberate about how we will live the four weeks of Advent.

Probably the first thing we need to do is take heart! As the Church, the people of God, we will be keeping Advent. Within this community, we listen to and sing words of prophecy

and hope. We enter into a time of darkness, of unknowing, of promise, and we dwell there. In addition to daily Masses, special Advent services will be held. We can take part in them and let them shape us.

Here we will learn again the deep truth that Advent does not simply commemorate a past birth, but leans forward into the future which that birth embodies. God is with us! God has taken our humanity into His own flowing life. The birth of Christ is the birth of hope, the promise of nothing less than a world re-created, a new heaven and a new earth.

Aside from gathering as a community, how can we live into this awesome promise in our daily lives? Amidst the cultural crush of materialism and excess, how can we as individuals and as families fully experience this rich, hidden season?

Here are some ideas for getting started. First, we can become aware of what typically clutters up the four weeks before Christmas for us and/or our family. Is it anxiety over gifts? A mind racing with what-needs-to-be-done? Parties? Too many commitments? Unrealistic expectations? Take the time to be honest about this. What, really, is getting in the way?

Second, following from this, what one practical step can be taken to help clear the decks? Perhaps it is re-thinking gift-giving. . . finding a way to quiet our minds . . . becoming more selective about parties. . . simplifying commitments . . . releasing expectations.

Advent is a gift in time. Calling on the Holy Spirit, find a way to make room in your hands to receive it. This season when we yearn for the end of time, the re-creation of the world, is the beginning of the Church year. In some mysterious way, beginning and ending are interwoven. How will we make this beginning?

*While Christ remained hidden in Mary, his rest was a tremendous activity; he was making her into himself, making himself from her. From her eyes he was making the eyes that would weep over Jerusalem, that would shine upon the wildflowers, that would close in death and open in the morning of Resurrection. From her hands he was making the hands that would heal and raise the dead and be nailed to the cross. From her heart he was making the heart whose love would redeem the world.*

*The same thing happens when, allowing the Infant Christ to rest in us, we wait patiently on his own timing of his growth in us, and give him just what he asks, the extremely simple things that are ourselves – our hands and feet, our eyes and ears, our words, our thoughts, our love. Not only does he grow in us, but we are formed into him.*

*(Caryll Houselander, The Passion of the Infant Christ)*