

# TWO ADVENT REFLECTIONS

## Advent – A Time to Rediscover our Joy in Life

Welcome to the first season of the Church's year, Advent. In the Christian calendar, Advent covers roughly the four weeks before Christmas, starting in late November or early December. Advent, however, is not simply a countdown to Christmas. Rather, we might think of this season as a signpost, marking our path, lighting our way, pointing to something beyond itself. Yes, it is a time of preparation for our celebration of the birth of Jesus, but it also marks a new Church year and a time to start over in our relationship with God and with others.

During the next few weeks, we will meet John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. We will meet Mary as she looks ahead to the birth of her baby and Elizabeth as she welcomes and celebrates this amazing news. In many ways, these characters are an unlikely bunch - a marginalised, pregnant young woman; an older woman unexpectedly pregnant, and an eccentric wilderness preacher - but we read that they are all 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. They are the first witnesses to Jesus' coming into the world, and we follow their stories as they announce him to others.

During Advent, we are invited to a real encounter with Jesus. **It is a time to wake up and to rediscover our joy in life.** It is a time to practise the words of Mary, 'Let it be', and to be open to what adventures may come our way. We become more aware of God's presence in the hidden places of our world, in ourselves and in the people around us. Can we be signposts lighting the path for others? At this busy time of year, we are often caught up in the frantic joys, and sometimes struggles, of the season. The lead-up to Christmas evokes different emotions and memories for each of us. As we enter this new season and new Church year, it is important to take some time to check in with ourselves. The gospel texts offer us the opportunity to go back to the beginning and enter fully into these Spirit-filled days when the advent of Jesus, the light of the world, is so eagerly anticipated.

*(Triona Doherty and Jane Mellet, The Deep End: A Journey with the Sunday Gospels in the Year of Matthew)*

## A Season of Waiting

Advent is the annual season of waiting. We wait for the same reason every year, and we are certain that the One we await, a person, Jesus, Son of God - will arrive on time. Yet we find that the waiting is new each year, as Jesus is ever new. Maybe we don't like the waiting, or maybe we enter enthusiastically into Advent, which in some countries now starts in October. Maybe we are happy to wait in patience and quiet.

Some wait actively, reminding themselves each day with prayer or reflection as to why they wait. **As Pope Francis said in *Let Us Dream*, our waiting is with the head (thinking about Advent), the heart (feeling with the season) and feet (doing something for others each day).**

There's a richness in waiting. I'm impatient, but I find sometimes that when I relax into waiting, something good happens for me. Whether it's waiting for a bus or a plane, or queueing in a shop, I notice different things about people or even new colours in the sky. I notice how I am in myself, and, like in waiting for sleep, I may make sense of the stresses of the day. Waiting in many ways is a good thing for us.

We wait also to notice where and how God is in our lives. This waiting is often compared to the watchman who waits, noticing all that is happening around him. He's on a height to see the surrounding world. Advent can be our hill or mountain. Each day we gather something new about God, ourselves and the world.

The way we wait affects how we celebrate and enjoy Christmas. The way we wait may grow in us a new realisation that everything about God, and especially God's Son, is worth our waiting. We wait for the Lord, because his day is near. Thanks be to God!

*(Donal Neary SJ, The Messenger Advent Booklet)*