

Waiting with Purpose



Advent.

Once a year the chance
to wait with purpose.

Makes a change.

– Carolyn Morris

LEADER VERSION 2021



In our waiting ...

God, we come to you in our waiting.

We wait with our fears,
our anxieties and frustrations,
our pains and regrets,
our shame and confusion.
God, help us to wait in peace.

We wait with impatience:
We rush around, preparing for festivities,
not leaving space to prepare our hearts.
God, help us to wait in faith.

We wait in excitement:
We are ready to celebrate!
We know the story
with its humbleness, simplicity and wonder.
God, help us to wait in joy.

We wait in thanksgiving:
We are free and able to celebrate.
We have others around us to share in the journey.
We are able to wonder at the marvel of your gift.
God, help us to receive your love.

– Katrina Crosby



Introduction

Advent. Once a year, the chance to wait with purpose.

The last two years have been like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the global community with unavoidable immediacy, it has dramatically altered everyone's daily life. For many, life has not slowed down, some are working longer and harder and others have not been able to work at all. The pain and suffering that has been felt across the human race has called us to pray and reflect in these uncertain times of waiting.

The Plenary Council, much like our Diocesan Synod, has needed to change and adapt so we can continue the journey of listening, discerning and contemplating. We are thankful that technology has allowed these gatherings to continue. Our conversations during these times have been abundant, fruitful, and have provided the opportunity to share our stories and our insights.

As we continue our synodal journey through Advent we invite you to a period of waiting through connecting with each other in prayer and reflection. Unlike the uncertainty that so many have experienced over the last two years, we know as Christians that our waiting in anticipation for the birth of Christ has purpose.

Over four weeks this resource provides the opportunity for us to encounter the mystery of Christ present in the Advent Gospels and our rich Catholic tradition. We are invited to encounter, recall, reflect, share, connect and consider how we will live differently as a result of what we have experienced.

By being together with our stories, our questions, our open hearts, and minds, we can form a community that lifts, honours, and learns from each other.

Let us wait with purpose this Advent so we can continue to build the Kingdom of God together.

Rose McAllister

Manager Formation and Education

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October 2021.

Pondering Advent with Brendan Byrne

Advent transports us back to the longing of the prophets of Israel for the coming of a Saviour. The Saviour has come. But salvation is not complete. We proclaim, 'Christ has died, Christ is risen', and then add, 'Christ will come again.'

Why? Because there is so much 'unfinished business' in the work of redemption. Our world and even the lives of believers still appear very 'unredeemed'. Our salvation is still being worked out.

The first generation of Christians believed that the Lord would return very soon to complete his messianic work. They were dismayed when some believers began to die and still he had not come (1 Thess 4:13-18). The later writings of the New Testament, the four Gospels included, all address this problem. It may be that the Lord will not come tomorrow, next year, or even before this generation dies out. But come he will in a time known only to God (Mark 13:32).

Meanwhile, this time of waiting is not devoid of meaning – like time spent waiting on a bus stop. This 'in-between' time is a sacred time, a time for the Church to proclaim the Gospel to every nation (Mark 13:10; Acts 1:6-8), to make sense of the present, while never giving up the hope that God's Messiah, Jesus, will have the last word.

Advent is the season that honours and celebrates this waiting aspect of Christian life. Because we live in the time following the first coming of the Saviour, the prime focus of our waiting and our expectation is upon the second coming of the Lord. But because salvation is not complete, because we are so conscious of a world still ravaged by suffering and violence, we can identify with the prophets and holy men and women who hung upon the promise of salvation before the first coming of the Lord. Their cries express our own longings and hopes for a liberated and just world.

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Since returning from graduate studies in Oxford in 1977, Brendan Byrne has been Professor of New Testament at Jesuit Theological College in Melbourne, Australia, of which he was Principal (1992-97). He was Rector of Campion College, Kew (1979-84) and a delegate to the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1983. He was a visiting professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, in 1993 and has also taught in East Asia and East Africa. He was a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (Rome) (1990-96) and President of the Melbourne College of Divinity (2000-01). He was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1999.

In summary

The time of Advent is the four-week period of preparation for the season of Christmas. Advent begins the cycle of the Liturgical Year and focuses on the coming of the Lord. The first weeks offer a vision of the future, looking to the end of time when Christ will come again. The final weeks point more specifically to the birth of Christ. Christ, the promised one, is awaited with joyful expectation. The First Sunday of Advent follows the final Sunday of Ordinary Time and the season concludes on Christmas Eve.

Colour: Violet Duration: 4 weeks Themes: preparation, waiting, anticipation, joy.

The Process of Mystagogical Reflection

Please refer to the accompanying document which introduces Mystagogical Reflection and explains the process.

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 ...

Mystagogical Reflection (Sunday Gospel)

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. No interpretation, just what happened.
The detail is important.*

3. Reflection: What did you notice – what word or phrase captures your attention?

What did you experience/feel? How does this relate to your life experience?

What meaning is God revealing to you?

An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter.

Meaning is found in being attentive to what the Holy Spirit is revealing to you about the dying – rising mystery of God's saving love.

4. Faith sharing: How is the meaning found in your encounter with Christ in the scripture connecting with the season of Advent? How are we being invited to know Christ more deeply and live more faithfully?

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 has revealed to us matter now?

An invitation to consider what it means to live from Christ.

How is this revelation/learning inviting us to participate in the Paschal Mystery?

6. Conversion: How will you live differently as a result of what you have experienced?

What is dying? What is being raised up?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God.



”


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

– *Daniel O’Leary*

Pattern for Gathering

Whether gathering online or physically, each gathering will follow the following pattern:

1. **Gathering**
2. **Invitation** (p. 5)
3. **Proclamation of the reading** (See relevant page)
4. **Mystagogical Reflection finishing in silent contemplation** (p. 5)
5. **Final Prayer/Blessing** (See relevant page)
A prayer and blessing are provided for each week. You may like to use something else or pray in response to the moment.
6. **Thank you**
And a reminder of the arrangements for the next gathering.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light-colored top and dark shorts, is sitting on large, dark rocks by the ocean. She is looking out at the water under a sunset sky. The scene is peaceful and contemplative. A white rectangular box with a light blue border is overlaid on the image, containing a quote in blue text.

***God waits silently
in our inner recesses,
the chambers of our soul,
gazing lovingly
on our treasure,
awaiting our response.***

– Yvonne Morland



Advent Gospels



First Sunday of Advent (28 November)

Background: The Coming of our Saviour (Michael Tate)

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 of 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.

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Gathering

The guide draws people together, ensuring everyone is introduced by name as that is necessary and has the resource required to participate.

The guide also gives a brief outline of the process of Mystagogical Reflection highlighting the task of each step and her/his role as 'guide'. Finally, the guide identifies who will proclaim the reading at the appointed time.

Invitation (p.5)



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

The gospel is 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.'

Final Prayer

The prayer follows the period of contemplation at the conclusion of the Mystagogical Reflection process.

Let us pray ...

God our saviour,
you utter a word of promise and hope
and hasten the day of justice and freedom,
yet we live in a world forgetful of your word,
our watchfulness dulled by the cares of life.

Keep us alert.
make us attentive to your word,
ready to look on your Son
when he comes with power and great glory.

Make us holy and blameless,
ready to stand secure
when the day of his coming shakes the world with
terror.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The following blessing may also be used.

Blessing

Hand in hand with God,
we will walk in light and justice.

Hand in hand with God,
we will be a light for others.

Hand in hand with God,
we will speak and live in love.

Come Lord Jesus.



Second Sunday of Advent (5 December)

Background: Gospel reflection (Greg Sunter)

The second and third weeks of Advent this year focus particularly on the role of John the Baptist as the one who prepared the way for Jesus and announced his coming. It continues the theme of preparation that was begun last week, but still, rather than preparing for the birth of Jesus, we are exploring the wider theme of preparation. The gospel writer includes a quote from Isaiah in which the prophet says, 'Prepare a way for the Lord.' (Often translated as 'Prepare the way of the Lord'.) The application of this passage to John the Baptist is a logical one. This gospel emphasises that John was preaching 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. Throughout the gospel of Luke, the recognition of sinfulness and the desire to repent and seek forgiveness is the prelude to receiving God's favour.

This gospel makes it clear that one way in which we can prepare a way for the Lord is to recognise our faults and failings and to seek forgiveness. It is only through such repentance that we can make ourselves receptive to the love of God. The only preparation of the way that is necessary for the Lord is a personal preparation to be receptive. We are absolutely assured of God's love. The problem is that we often feel that we are undeserving of that love or are unable to receive it. When we are called to 'Prepare a way for the Lord' it is a call to prepare a way in our own hearts – to break down the barriers that we have put up; to clear the obstacles that we have placed in the path. God's love will find a way! We simply make the way easier for ourselves to recognise God's love if we 'Prepare a way'.

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Invitation (p.5)

Gospel (Lk 3:1-6)

The gospel is 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.

Final Prayer

The prayer follows the period of contemplation at the conclusion of the Mystagogical Reflection process.

Let us pray ...

God of our salvation,
you straighten the winding ways of our hearts
and smooth the paths made rough by sin.

Make our conduct blameless
keep our hearts watchful in holiness
and bring to perfection the good you have begun in us.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The following blessing may also be used.

Blessing

Hand in hand with God,
we will walk in light and justice.

Hand in hand with God,
we will be a light for others.

Hand in hand with God,
we will speak and live in love.

Come Lord Jesus.



Third Sunday of Advent (12 December)

Background: What must we do? (Mary Coloe)

The Gospel continues with the message of John, as preparation for the coming of Jesus. As mentioned last week, within the early church there was the concern to give honour to John, while at the same time to preach that Jesus was even greater. John was the herald, announcing the coming of the saviour, but Jesus was the Saviour, as the angels will tell the Shepherds at Bethlehem. Some even wonder if John is the Christ, the long-promised Messiah. John asserts that his baptism is only with water, but Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Recall that Luke is the author of Acts where at Pentecost the Spirit appears as 'tongues of fire'.)

Rejoicing is the theme of this Sunday as announced in the First and Second Readings ...

When asked the question, 'What must we do?' John gives advice that is as appropriate in our time as it was in his. He tells us, 'Share with those in need, be fair in your dealings with others and don't abuse your power.' Luke's community is thought to have been the city of Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire at that time. His Gospel must deal with the real-life issues that affect his hearers, such as how to live as a Christian in a complex, urban, economically driven and multi-racial world: does this sound familiar? Being a Christian is far more than one hour of worship each week. We live out Christian values in the choices we make at the supermarket and the bank, the petrol we purchase, and the brand of clothes we wear. John's answers were no doubt uncomfortable to his listeners who may have been expecting a more 'religious' answer, such as 'Pray longer in the Synagogue', but John plunges to the heart of the Gospel message. You can desire God's reign or you can seek after wealth and power, but you cannot have both. This may sound impossible but John holds out a message of hope: for having spoken to the people about what they must do, John then speaks of what God will do – baptise you with the Holy Spirit. The symbol of fire associated with the Spirit suggests that the Spirit will purify us. God's gift of a purifying Spirit can empower us to choose the values of God's reign (the *basilica*) as against the attractions of wealth.

As Christmas approaches, ask the Baptist your own question, 'What must I do?' And listen for an answer.

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Invitation (p.5)

Gospel (Lk 3:10-18)

The gospel is 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.



Final Prayer

The prayer follows the period of contemplation at the conclusion of the Mystagogical Reflection process.

Let us pray ...

Almighty God,
you sent your Son into a world
where the wheat must be winnowed from the chaff
and evil clings even to what is good.

Let the fire of your Spirit
purge us of greed and deceit,
so that, purified, we may find our peace in you
and you may delight in us.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The following blessing may also be used.

Blessing

Hand in hand with God,
we will walk in light and justice.

Hand in hand with God,
we will be a light for others.

Hand in hand with God,
we will speak and live in love.

Come Lord Jesus.



Fourth Sunday of Advent (19 December)

Background: You are blessed among all women (Mary Coloe)

Before addressing the specific Gospel passage, I want to reflect on the significance of Luke's Infancy Narrative ... At Christmas, we are not celebrating 'baby Jesus'. We are celebrating our living relationship now with the Risen One. This is an important shift in focus moving us beyond mere nostalgia and memories of childhood to develop a more robust faith for their adult years.

Luke's Gospel needs to be read accurately and with some knowledge of the customs of that time. Reading back into Luke, our experiencing of travel, finding accommodation, and where animals are housed, distorts the narrative.

The purpose of the infancy narrative is not to provide historical information, which we might expect, but to provide a theological introduction to the adult Jesus and Luke's interpretation of Jesus' mission.

After the annunciation, and again the birth, Luke brings characters together where one character, representative of ancient, faithful Israel, recognises and rejoices in the new salvific act of God in Jesus. So, Elizabeth sings Mary's praise, and Simeon acknowledges that his time is now complete. These characters give expression to Luke's theology that the time of Israel, the time of O.T. promise is finished as now those promises are being fulfilled.

In this last week of Advent, the Gospel turns its focus to two pregnant women, Mary and her cousin Elizabeth. As any parent knows, pregnancy is a time of heightened longing, waiting and expectancy; as such, these two women provide a great symbol of Advent's theme. Elizabeth feels in her womb the first stirrings of her child and filled with the Spirit gives praise for the child in Mary's womb. While recognising the blessedness of Mary's child, Mary herself is called blessed for her faith, rather than her maternity. Mary believes. In this is her greatness and her importance in the Christian tradition – as woman, mother and believer.

This visitation of Mary to Elizabeth prefigures the great visitation that is the joyful message of Luke's Gospel, God's visitation to all people. As the Gospel unfolds, Jesus will be the symbol and presence of God's gracious visit to us. Luke will show us Jesus visiting the homes of various people such as Peter whose mother-in-law is ill (Lk 4:38-39), Simon the Pharisee (Lk 7:36-50), and Zacheus (Lk 19:1-10). Jesus will also be the host inviting all to gather at his table (Lk 9:10-17; 22:14-27). Even before Jesus' ministry begins, God's active coming to people is given flesh in a young woman's journey to her cousin.

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Invitation (p.5)

Gospel (Lk 1:39-45)

The gospel is 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.'

Final Prayer

The prayer follows the period of contemplation at the conclusion of the Mystagogical Reflection process.

Let us pray ...

Who are we, Lord God,
that you should come to us?
Yet you have visited your people
and redeemed us in your Son.

As we prepare to celebrate his birth,
make our hearts leap for joy at the sound of your
Word,
and move us by your Spirit to bless your wonderful
works.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

Hand in hand with God,
we will walk in light and justice.

Hand in hand with God,
we will be a light for others.

Hand in hand with God,
we will speak and live in love.

Come Lord Jesus.



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