

# What are we waiting for?

## Reflections through Advent

Each year as Advent comes round we are invited to WAIT. Waiting can be hard – like waiting for exam results. But waiting can be full of expectation; a time to prepare for something great that is going to happen.

This is the spirit of Advent – an experience of eager longing, of confidence that a promise will be fulfilled; a time to get ready for a big event.

Ancient writers remind us that Advent recalls Three Comings of Christ among us:

- His coming in the past as a human infant on the first Christmas night
- His coming now through his Risen Presence in us and among us
- His coming in glory at the end of time.

*For Reflection: What will help me to live in a spirit of expectancy this Advent? You might reflect on the Three Comings of Jesus and speak to Him in prayer about them.*

## Week One

### Prophetic Expectation

*“They will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles, nation will not lift sword against nation, there will be no more training for war.”  
Isaiah 2:4*

In the war-torn country where the prophet lived, the people longed for peace just as they do today. Isaiah did not live to see the Messiah who would come “to guide our feet in the way of peace” and offer us peace through the gift of his life on the cross.

Throughout Advent, the insights of the Old Testament prophets give us a picture of this promised Messiah – he will be a Light in our darkness, a shepherd caring for his flock, a child born to save us, a maker of peace. Above all, in some mysterious way, he will be Emmanuel, God-with-us.

These prophetic words were spoken by men who, somehow, had experienced God in their own lives, men who had come to know God as we know a friend. That knowing of the mind and heart of God was, above all, what made them prophets.

*For Reflection: Read a few passages from Isaiah and spend a little time praying over them. (for example: 7:10-14; 9:2-7; 40:1-11) Is there any way in which we are called to be prophets?*

## Week Two

### Prepare the Way of the Lord

John said,

*“I baptise you with water for repentance but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am and I am not fit to carry his sandals.... Matt 3:11*

In the Gospels, John the Baptist continues the mission of the Old Testament prophets and points ahead to the promised Messiah. St Mark begins his Gospel with a quotation from Isaiah which he applies to John,

***“The voice of the one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the lord, make his paths straight.’ “ Mark 1:3***

In St John’s Gospel, the Baptist encourages his own disciples to follow Jesus saying, ***“Look, here is the Lamb of God!”***

Like Isaiah and many other prophets in Israel, John fulfilled his mission in face of suffering and, in his case, a cruel death. Jesus praised his fidelity to his call to be the herald announcing to people the presence of the Messiah.

***For Reflection: Read some of the Gospel passages about John the Baptist and ask for a share in his enthusiasm, courage, selflessness and fidelity. (for example Matt 3:1-12; Matt 14:3-4; Matt 11:7-15) In what ways does the world need a John the Baptist today?***

## **Week Three**

### **The Lord is With You**

The angel said,

***“Mary, do not be afraid for you have won God’s favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son and you must name him Jesus.” Lk 1:30-31***

In his Nativity Story, St Luke introduces us to some holy old folk, the faithful ones of Israel, yearning for the coming of the Messiah. But at the centre of the story is a young girl, Mary, the first of a new era, the one through whom the Son of God will become one of our race.

St Bernard has sermon in which he dramatises this Annunciation scene as if it were happening now and we are all present. He tells Mary that the whole world is waiting for her answer and begs her not to delay in saying “Yes” to God,

***And Mary answers, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Lk 1:38***

***For Reflection: After reading St Luke’s description of the Annunciation, you might try to be present at this mysterious moment when, as St John says, “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” Jn 1:14***

## Week Four

### Magnificat!

When she visited her cousin Elizabeth, Mary said,

*“The almighty works marvels for me, Holy is his name!” Lk 1:49*

Only in the last week of Advent do we have a reading about the, as yet, unborn Jesus, when his presence in Mary’s womb made the unborn Baptist leap for joy. This event happens during Mary’s Advent, her nine months of waiting for the birth of the Messiah.

This meeting of two pregnant women, Mary and Elizabeth, is also the occasion of Mary’s great song of praise, the Magnificat. This song, woven from the worship of Israel, encourages us to believe that, in spite of all the areas of darkness, the plan of God is unfolding – the Light is shining always in the darkness and the darkness can never overcome it.

*For Reflection: This year the fourth week of Advent has only two days. The Magnificat is a good prayer for these days. As we read, we can ask for a share in Mary’s great joy at the closeness of the Messiah. This prayer is essentially a song so many find it helpful to use one or more of the various musical settings. (for example: Taize, Margaret Rizza, “Tell Out my Soul”, Plainchant, etc)*

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