

Friends of the Center

Advent

Advent is a time of anticipation. It is that time of waiting for something that is to come, not waiting for some cataclysm, but waiting for something that is good, for something we desire, for something that will bring us joy, and peace and justice, and love, and hope—all things good.

The word “advent” is derived from the Latin *adventus* (coming). For many centuries, actually since the sixth century, Christians have been waiting for Jesus. Until the Middle Ages, Christians marked this time of waiting for the Second Coming when Jesus Christ will come to judge all living and dead. But beginning with the early Middle Ages, we have waited for Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem during a special four-week period just before Christmas. One way or another, this waiting period has been a time of introspection, self-reflection, and also of joyous envisioning of what Jesus will bring to the world.

What is that? What do you envision? What do you desire for the world, for creation and for us humans in it?

Peace? We certainly need that, as we always have in the midst of tragic wars and conflicts between peoples.

Justice? We’ve always dreamed of a just world in which everyone would have enough daily bread, a dignified life, and a safe place to live.

Love? We see how the acrimonious, sometimes even hateful, divisions separate individuals and groups from each other.

Joy to bask in all the blessings that God bestows on God’s creation?

Hope that all these things, peace, justice, love, and joy would become a reality someday?

We anticipate; we wait for that day when God’s kingdom will come and God’s will shall be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

What do you envision?

In the meantime, we wait, and every year for four weeks before Christmas, we sing Advent hymns (sometimes even mixing in some Christmas carols because we can’t wait!). In some Christian denominations in the United States, we light one, two, three, four Advent-wreath candles each of the weeks of Advent. On Christmas Eve, we



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light a fifth candle, the “Christ candle,” that has been in the center of the wreath. That fifth candle symbolizes Jesus’s birth irrupting into our darkness, pointing to hope, love, joy, and peace, represented by the other four candles.

As we light candle after candle each week, the light gets brighter and brighter. That is the light of Christ that we anticipate. That is the light that breaks through into the world and even into all of creation. That is the light that illumines our vision so that we see the injustices and the lack of love, compassion, care, and equity towards those who are trying desperately to live with some dignity. That is the light that dispels the darkness that imprisons individuals and masses of people in apathy toward those who have been rendered disposed and underprivileged—the poor, the exploited, the oppressed, the invisibles. That is also the light that breaks the inner darkness of the selfish-focus that alienates us one from another. That is the light that, in our best moments, we see lighting our way to our better hopes for all of us.



Just as Mary waited for her baby, in Advent we wait for the coming of Jesus. Our lives are changed; our hope renewed; our joy is made real. We are embraced by the divine love in Jesus, and we can’t help but share the peace on Earth and the good will to all that Jesus brings.

– Rev. Dr. Alicia Vargas

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