

Stepping into Advent from Bishop Reed

Very often, the first Sunday of Advent comes so soon after Thanksgiving that we hear ourselves saying, “Is it Advent already? Where does the time go?” We have been so immersed in the spirit of Autumn—from the back-to-school routines to Halloween to the changing colors of the leaves—that Advent, with its hints of the wintry festival of Yule—sort of abruptly takes us into another season.

Indeed, time does fly...whether you are having fun or not!

It was quite different for those who experienced the first Advent—our Jewish brothers and sisters of old who had no such timetable and waited centuries for the coming of the promised Messiah. We, who live in a time when the Gospel has been proclaimed, have an opportunity once a year to put ourselves in the shoes of those who could only hope for His coming. We, who in Faith see and hear the Christ, anticipate the birth of Jesus as if it had not yet happened in time. This is not merely a childlike exercise of pretend, as if we were trying to recover the excitement of believing in Santa Claus. Rather, it is the living out of our faith through the commemorations of the liturgical year.

Sometimes I wonder as I wander if we lose sight of the longing for a Messiah that God’s people once had. We have the benefit of hindsight—of being able to look back and acknowledge that this is how it happened. But do we take it all for granted? We treasure this time of year, and that’s wonderful: it’s certainly a time when we can have a heightened sense of family, of closeness to one another and to God, of the warmth of our homes, of special celebrations and traditions (remembering of course those who are without many of those things). Often, there is a let-down when the season is over and we return to the ordinariness of daily life.

This Advent, could we not make an extra effort to meditate more deeply on how key this season really is—and the reason for it. At least once a week—on Sundays—draw back from the hustle and bustle of the “holiday season” and enter into God’s time. Try this experiment in your prayer: imagine yourself to be living in ancient Israel. You know the Scriptures and how they speak of the promised Messiah. “When will He come?” you keep asking. As we watch the Advent candle being lit before Mass (and maybe in our homes as well), we might remind ourselves that we live both in time (symbolized by the progressive burning of candles) and in eternity (denoted by the wreath on which the candles are set—in the form of a ring, it has no beginning and no end). The world after the Fall of Adam was destined to be an eternity in darkness, but God our Father would not let that happen. Every time He extended His hand to us, every prophet He sent, it was as if He were giving us a candle to illumine that darkness and give man a chance to find his way home. And every candle we light on the Sundays of Advent is one more step we take toward Christ, the Light of the World.

As we get caught up in the hustle and bustle, these four weeks WILL fly by. And Christmas will come and go, and our minds will be directed to the next “big holiday,” according to the world’s timetable. Don’t miss the opportunity to receive a great gift from God, which you can hold onto throughout the New Year: Allow yourself to prayerfully go into the “timeless” realm of prayer where you can meditate on that time “Before Christ.” What a dark, sad world we would be living in if a young Jewish maiden had not said Yes to God. We too have the chance to allow Christ to be born in us—and receive from God a the Light that alone guides us toward eternity.

+  Robert T. Reed