



ADVENT WEEK 1 | HOPE

November 27, 2022

PRELUDE | *Jesus Is Coming* (All songs can be found on the [Advent Resource Page](#))

WELCOME | Announcements (Fast, Resources, VHOP) & Introducing Advent

“Advent,” says Malcolm Guite, “is a paradoxical season: a season of waiting and anticipation in which ***the waiting itself is strangely rich and fulfilling***, a season that looks back at the people who waited in darkness for the coming light of Christ and yet forward to a fuller light still to come and illuminate our darkness.

Advent falls in winter, at the end of the year, in the dark and cold, but its focus is on the coming of light and life, when the Ancient of Days becomes a young child and says, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’

Perhaps only poetry,” the poetry of songs and stories as well as scripture, “can help us fathom the depths and inhabit the tensions of these paradoxes,”¹ of being a people who wait still for light and life.

Our word, “Advent,” emerged from the Latin word *veni*, which means “coming, the coming of Christ [Jesus] in every way.” Jesus arrived in history in great humility in a Bethlehem home. Jesus will arrive in the clouds, in splendid glory, to the “fulfillment and finality of all things.” “But surely,” contends Guite, “between this beginning and this end, there are many other advents. Jesus with us always from His last day on earth to the end of the ages. Jesus “In our encounters with the poor and stranger, in the mystery of the sacraments, in those unexpected moments of transfiguration,” which the Examen encourages us to see. “surely there is also an advent and Christ come to us,” who are paying attention to daily grace(s).

“Faith,” says Fredrick Buechner, “is waiting.” Not motionless, passive waiting, but an expectant waiting on God to act as we journey onward. “Faith,” continues Buechner, “is journeying through space and time...a journey in search of a homeland...a way of paying attention.”² Perhaps there is no season more favorable to faith than Advent and Christmas. A season in which we journey through the past with visions of the future even as we anticipate God’s acting in the present. A season in which every

¹ Malcolm Guite, *Waiting On The Word*, ix.

² Fredrick Buechner, *The Clown In The Belfry*, 12.

scripture and song, collect and carol, decoration, and declaration helps us pay attention in our waiting to the many other arrivals for which we hope.

CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 37:3-9

*Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness; feed on God's faithfulness.
Delight yourself in the Lord, keep a soft and open heart to him,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.
He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.
Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!
Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.
For the evildoers shall be cut off, but **those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.***

SONG #1 | *This Is Jesus*

ADVENT WREATH | Cohen Pace

“God’s people, after they came home from being slaves, had forgotten how God wanted them to live, or who they were supposed to be. So...All day they listened to stories about the wonderful things God had done for his people. How he made the world. How he gave a special promise to Abraham. How he rescued them from slavery. How He spoke to Moses and showed them how to live. How he brought them to a special land. How he rescued them—no matter what, time after time, over and over again—because of his Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love.

They remembered how God had always, all through the years, been loving his children—keeping his promise to Abraham, taking care of them, forgiving them. Even when they disobeyed. Even when they ran away from him. Even when they thought they didn’t need him. Then God told his children something more...He said,

‘I can’t stop loving you. You are my heart’s treasure. But I lost you. Now I am coming back for you. I am like the sun that gently shines on you, chasing away darkness and fear and death. You’ll be so happy—you’ll be like little calves running free in an open field. I am going to send my Messenger—The Promised One. The One you have been waiting for. The Rescuer. He is coming. So Get Ready!’

It had taken centuries for God’s people to be ready, but now the time had almost come for the best part of God’s Plan. **God himself was going to come.** Not to punish his people – but to rescue them. God was getting ready to wipe away every tear from every eye.”³

"We wait with hope...believing that something is happening in our world, something is taking shape in our lives, something large, *light-filled*, life-giving."⁴

³ “Get Ready” found in the *Jesus Story Book Bible*, 170-175.

⁴ Bobby Gross, *Living the Christian Year*, 37.

HYMN/CAROL | *O Come O Come Emmanuel*

DISMISS KIDS

SCRIPTURE READING | Isaiah 11:1-10

A green Shoot will sprout from Jesse's stump, from his roots a budding Branch.

The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over him, the Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding, The Spirit that gives direction and builds strength, the Spirit that instills knowledge and Fear-of-God.

Fear-of-God will be all his joy and delight. He won't judge by appearances, won't decide on the basis of hearsay. He'll judge the needy by what is right, render decisions on earth's poor with justice. **His words will bring everyone to awed attention.** A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked.

Each morning he'll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots, and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.

The wolf will romp with the lamb, the leopard sleep with the kid. Calf and lion will eat from the same trough, and a little child will tend them. Cow and bear will graze the same pasture, their calves and cubs grow up together, and the lion eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will crawl over rattlesnake dens, the toddler stick his hand down the hole of a serpent. Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill on my holy mountain. The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.

On that day, Jesse's Root will be raised high, posted as a rallying banner for the peoples. The nations will all come to him. His headquarters will be glorious.

SONG #3 | *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*

SERMONETTE |

We are “Somewhere between the fact of darkness and the hope of light.” Indeed that is not only *where* we are but *who* we are. “We are the people who walk in darkness as to one degree or another people have always walked in darkness.”⁵ Maybe that’s what makes Advent and the Christmas season so universally—even if not essentially or truthfully—celebrated. Whether we can name it or not, we know we are in the dark, and the dark is in us; nevertheless, we wait for the Light to come, for a splendor and “a holiness to heal us and hallow us, to liberate us from the dark.”⁶

Doesn’t Advent and Christmas, with all their songs and symbols, awaken in our being, unearth in our core: the hope of light in the fact of darkness? Or, in the words of John the beloved,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. That which has been made was life in him, and the life was the light of humanity. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (John 1:1-5, 9)

Faith, as we have been reminded over the last several weeks, “is a way of seeing in the dark,” in the darkness that still persists, “It is what makes the darkness endurable.”⁷ And the language of faith is “full of poetry and symbol.”⁸ From the Word sparking life and the light walking among us in John’s gospel, to the wolf dwelling with the lamb as the child leads the calf and lion in Isaiah’s prophecy, to the psalmist’s command to graze on God’s actions like contented sheep in safe pasture; “That is the kind of language faith speaks. The danger,” contends Buechner, “is either we dismiss it as mere fairy tale [sentimentality or a seasonal spirit] or we become so caught up by its fairy tale power to enchant us with its beauty that we forget that its whole point as poetry [and symbol] is to point us to its truth.”⁹

And “This story that faith tells in the fairy tale language of faith,” continues Buechner, “is not just that God is...but that God comes. [Arrives] here...[the true Light] to us came. For us came...it [is] true—not just the way fairy tales are true but as the truest of all truths.”¹⁰

I believe we all know this truth, at least in the sense that we can attest to it as a propositional fact. But the beauty of poetry is “the magical, generative power”¹¹ of words “to show us something we think we already know, and in that showing, show us ‘something more’.”¹²

⁵ Friedrich Buechner, “Light and Dark,” *The Clown In The Belfry*, 121-122.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹ Malcome Guite, *The Word Within The Words*, 14.

¹² Guite, *Waiting On The Word*, 111.

So, I want to read us a poem, drawing out a bit of the “something more,” and then take advantage of this Sabbath day of Advent to rest in faith, reflecting on our place and person in the fact of darkness and hope of light.

ANNUNCIATION | *Scott Cairns*

Deep within the clay, and O my people
very deep within the wholly earthen
compound of our kind arrives of one clear,
star-illuminated evening a spark igniting
once again the tinder of our lately
banked noetic fire. She burns but she
is not consumed. The dew lights gently,
suffusing the pure fleece. The wall comes down.
And—*do you feel the pulse?*—we all become
the kindled kindred of a King whose birth
thereafter bears to all a bright nativity.

Deep within the clay...The dirt from which Adam was formed (Genesis) and the clay jars that Paul says contain the light of God himself shining out of the darkness.

O my people very deep within the wholly earthen compound of our kind... Entirely in the complexity of our humanity, “made in every respect like his brothers and sisters,” as the author of Hebrews puts it (2:17, 4:15)

arrives of one clear star-illuminated evening... “Advent is a season that looks for a coming,” like the people of God in the story Cohen read for us, “for an arrival, and ‘arrives,’ in that present continuous tense...”¹³ **What arrives or continues arriving?**

a spark igniting once again the tinder of our lately banked noetic fire... The light of humanity, shining in the darkness, coming to enlighten everyone, as John says, while beginning with the announcement to Mary that she would bear God’s Son, “is about arriving once again at the place where we started, the wholly good, original blessing of that Genesis moment,” when God breathed life into our lungs. **An arrival home**, via a fire rekindled—a tinder, a knowledge (noetic) reborn of who and whose we truly are.

A spark ignited that is not wholly new but re-lighting of life in line with the faithful of our history.

¹³ Guite, *Waiting On The Word*, 20.

She burns but she is not consumed... Like Moses and the burning bush, Mary became the sacred ground of God's dwelling, holiness arriving not to destroy but to bring freedom and life.

The dew lights gently, suffusing the pure fleece... Like Gideon, we wonder if we are worthy and capable of God's favor and calling, and like Gideon, God responds to our question with a Yes, letting dew fall only on the fleece, letting the payment for our sins fall only on the pure fleece of the Lamb slain.

The wall comes down... What divided us from God and one another, like the walls of Jericho and the temple veil, come falling down at the sound of the Word and his work.

And—do you feel the pulse?—we all become the kindled kindred of a King whose birth thereafter bears to all a bright nativity... Can you feel the life, the life in you of God's life, God with you and us, God for you and us, and the hope of light, the Light of the World himself, not merely in the future but brought into the world through His life in you and us through our "bright nativity" and daily living?

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Corinthians 4:6-7)

REFLECTION / POEM

For a moment, let's settle into the silence of this space and the solitude of our seats. Breathing in: "Hope comes," and breathing out: "from You." When your mind wanders to activities and obligations, just breathe and pray: "Hope comes, from You."

Now in the quieting of mind and heart, in the stilling of the body, like those who have come before us who waited in faith, who journeyed home in the fact of darkness and in the light of hope, let us see in faith that "It is still a very dark world...but the darkness is different [to us] because he keeps getting born into it,"¹⁴ in our "bright nativities." **Let's ask the poem's question in hopes of being shown something more.**

The wall comes down.
And—*do you feel the pulse?*—we all become
the kindled kindred of a King whose birth
thereafter bears to all a bright nativity

¹⁴ Buechner, 125.

COLLECT & COMMUNION

COLLECT | *First Sunday of Advent*

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Through the body, blood, and life everlasting of Jesus, amen.

SONG #4 | *Come Light Our Hearts*

SCRIPTURE READING | Habakkuk 2:1-4

What's God going to say to my questions? I'm braced for the worst. I'll climb to the lookout tower and scan the horizon. I'll wait to see what God says, how he'll answer my complaint.

And then God answered: "Write this. Write what you see. Write it out in big block letters so that it can be read on the run. This vision-message is a witness pointing to what's coming. It aches for the coming—it can hardly wait! And it doesn't lie. If it seems slow in coming, wait. It's on its way. It will come right on time.

"Look at that man, bloated by self-importance— full of himself but soul-empty. But the person in right standing before God through loyal and steady believing is fully alive, *really* alive.

SONG #5 | *He Comes*

SONG #6 | *All Things New*

BENEDICTION | James 5:7-8

Meanwhile, friends, wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. You see farmers do this all the time, waiting for their valuable crops to mature, patiently letting the rain do its slow but sure work.

Be patient like that. Stay steady and strong. The Master could arrive at any time.