

# INTRO TO ADVENT

In the four weeks of Advent we are invited to participate in the story of a world larger than our own. We celebrate as the Story of God becomes the Story of Emmanuel, "God With Us." In the Incarnation the Holy breaks into the ordinary – the Light of the World enters our space and time.

Advent offers us a place and time to nurture God's presence as we prepare for Christmas. In a life busy with many things it calls us aside to consider the reasons behind our actions and to remind us of what is most important in life. Our actions grow more sensitive, responsive and loving. Gifts chosen carefully and intentionally for loved ones, a hug and warm cider given to welcome travelers home, , decorations and candles thoughtfully arranged to bring delight and beauty to the coming celebration, food ladled onto plates for the less fortunate, carols sung for those who are housebound. Prepare while you wait, by all means, but let us be present to the Spirit of God as we walk through the preparations for this important celebration, for God calls us not only to be knowledgeable of his story – He calls us to participate in it 'with Him.'

The Advent Calendar with its daily opening of a window expecting to see the Christ child, the beauty and light of the Advent Wreath, the Jesse Tree, these are ways we participate in the joy and expectation of the season. We rejoice as we begin our journey to the manger in Bethlehem to witness the birth of Jesus. We sing, we read God's story, we express His love to others and in this way we celebrate how God With Us, El Shaddai, welcomed humanity to walk the journey with him. How blessed we are to find our place in the story of God.

How sad it would be if, in our busy preparations, we missed seeing whom it is we are celebrating.

LAUREL SMITH

The lovely old carols played and replayed till their effect is like a dentist's drill...the banalities of the pulpit and chilling commercialism of almost everything else, people spending money they can't afford on presents you neither need nor want, "Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer," the plastic tree, the cornball crèche, the Hallmark Virgin. Yet for all our efforts, we've never quite managed to ruin it. That in itself is part of the miracle, a part you can see. Most of the miracle you can't see, or don't... Christmas itself is by grace. It could never have happened or survived otherwise...The Word become flesh. Ultimate Mystery born...Incarnation... "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God...who for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven" - experience the mystery this Christmas season.

[Frederick Buechner, Whistling in the Dark]

## THE SECOND COMING

Sometimes I wonder what this life is all about. A big question, no doubt. If I did not have Jesus I know it would be different, but how? I would not have hope as only a believer can - knowing one day Jesus will come again.

Years of depression and anxiety would certainly be different. If not for the presence of Jesus in my life, and God's promise of the 'Coming of the Kingdom', the suffering I have felt would all be in vain. Years ago I heard this quote and it really stuck with me:

**"MAN IS NOT DESTROYED BY SUFFERING;  
HE IS DESTROYED BY SUFFERING  
WITHOUT MEANING"**

**V. FRANKL**

During my depression, days were tiresome and nights were long. Fear filled my every thought and consumed my body. Yet, when I look back, although it is hard to see sometimes, I know Jesus was with me every step of the way. God was gracious when I complained, and celebrated successes with me along the way. He has a way of doing work in us without us even knowing it. He gave me a tender heart; a heart that weeps with and for others who are going through similar situations.

I am so glad to have suffered with Jesus by my side. My suffering was not without meaning!

As our world falls apart, let us sit in this chair in this empty room, let us feel God's arms wrap around us and hold us tenderly while we cry. Let Him whisper in our ears. "... *And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it (Jerusalem) no more*", Isaiah 65: 19. The sound of our tears will no longer be heard in Jerusalem, because there will be no more tears to shed. What a wonderful vision of our lives to come.

When will this day come? We do not know. The religious leaders of the day asked Jesus this very question, we should heed his response, Luke 17: 20-37. We should also pay attention to Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18. It is a beautiful picture of the day we all hope for. A day we all live for. The day when Jesus returns to call us home.

As this advent season begins, I will praise the Lord, Psalm 103. I will cling to the hope of His return. I will let go of my life, in order to save it, and live an abundant life with Jesus, Luke 17: 33.

MAVIS DZAKA

**"On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity.... At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and life up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."  
(Luke 21:25, 27-28)**

**Christ's return amidst a dark and crumbling world will bring restoration and light, and those who hope in Jesus will be gathered to be with the Lord for eternity!**



HIM WHO IS TO COME  
VANESSA BUECKERT

*Everlasting God,  
it's Advent once again.  
We've eagerly waited for change,  
but it appears little has happened.  
Expand in me the great hope that one  
day I will be raised from this broken  
earth –  
changed in the blink of an eye –  
and that everything bent and bruised,  
curdled and corrupted,  
in me  
and this world,  
will be transformed into lasting  
goodness, righteousness, and truth.  
In Jesus' name,  
amen.*

*(Belgic Confessional 37)*

# HOPE

Sitting back in my easy chair, I glance out the bay window and see a road that is not yet travelled. The path is unknown, full of wonder, experiences and hope that will bring new beginnings. Along the road we cannot predict the weather, when the seasons change, the road bumps that will happen or how long it will take to travel. The unknown brings anticipation and hope for the future. There are times in our lives where we wonder how or why, and there are times where we see a glimmer of hope or a miracle that is unseen by the naked eye. We know our Maker is at work and this restores our hope in the future to come.

We come together over this season in prayer and anticipation of new life. Looking through the window pane, I see children laughing, people smiling, family and kinship. The innocence in these moments take my breath away and bring much happiness, contentment and thanksgiving. We are called to come together and give thanks for the life we have been given to live. In the times when we endure, we are called to come together and unite. In these times we see the face of our Great God, and the mercy He brings us through our trials. During these times God asks us to rely on Him to direct our paths, and to relinquish control and trust in Him. Along this road not yet travelled, we can truly know that we will be carried by Him along the way, and that the road brings hope and a new phase of life.

*"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." – NIV Hebrews 11:1*

## Hope in Him

He comes to us as a babe,  
Innocent, pure, to bring New Life.  
He brings freedom, and assures us of a  
future free of strife.  
He brings Hopefulness  
Optimism  
Peace  
Everlasting life.

### We trust in Him.

We look to Him to direct our paths.  
And in Him we will be renewed and  
restored.  
We are His children, and come together in  
Hope.

Along our path of life, there is so much opportunity. There will be road blocks that divert us, but through reliance in Him and togetherness, our hope for a brighter future is restored. We long for the coming of our Saviour on Christmas day and welcome Him into our hearts, to renew us and bring us hope for our bright future.

The road may be bumpy, attacks may come, but our Saviour brings us a longing for Hope that is indescribable. Togetherness, unity and reliance in Him through love. In Him all things are possible.

*"Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared." – Proverbs 3:25-26.*

VANESSA CHESTERS





COME TO US, ABIDE WITH US, OUR LORD, EMMANUEL  
JANET ANDERSON

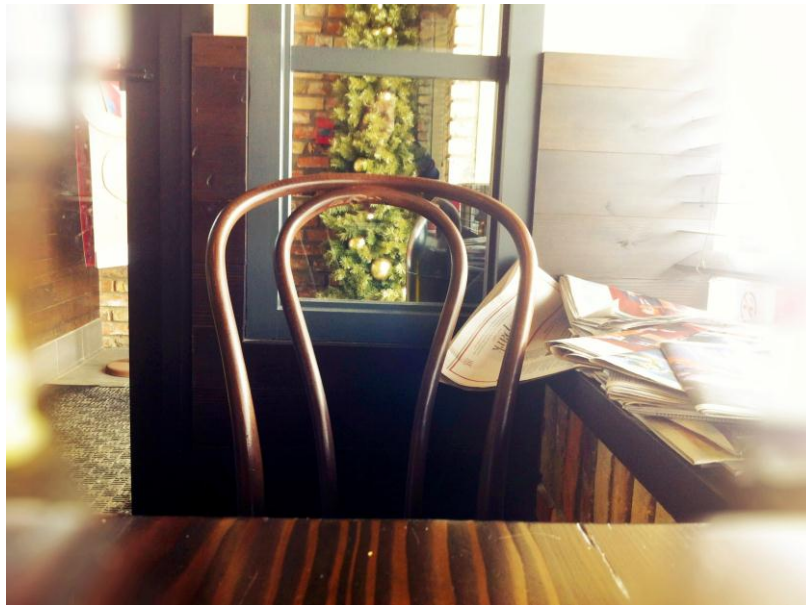
The empty chair is one that guests usually sit in when we host. The vantage point is from my couch where I sit in the mornings and spend time with God – through the window is our front yard, our neighbourhood. The telescope draws my eye out, out of my little world of home and family and into the lives of my neighbours (metaphorically speaking!). This is where I long for Christ to be incarnated through me - in my home, through my hospitality, and in my neighbourhood. This is where I pray "O come, O come Emmanuel".

Sure to come Saviour, I  
believe your coming  
again will mean the  
righting of all that is  
wrong; it will complete  
your rescue plan and  
fully carry out your  
redemption... But that  
sweet comfort makes the  
waiting all that much  
harder. Come quickly,  
Lord Jesus, and redeem  
your people; come  
quickly and rescue us.  
Amen.

(Belgic Confessional 37)

## WAITING

*God comes like the sun in the morning – when it is time. We must assume an attitude of waiting, accepting the fact that we are creatures and not creator. We must do this because it is not our right to do anything else. The initiative is God's, not ours."* - Carlo Carretto



A PLACE IN OUR HEARTS AND LIVES...LONGING FOR HIS PRESENCE  
CHRIS READ

When the flames of the Advent wreath flicker and carols are sung, we search for light, peace, and righteousness.

The Psalms of Lament [such as Psalm 94] eloquently express the sense of God's absence. Here, the psalmists recount their longings and remind themselves [and God] that what they feel now they have not always felt, and will not always feel. Words such as, "**Shine forth**" and "**Rise up**," acknowledge God's presence but also His freedom to act as He chooses. The cry, "**How Long?**" voices hope that a change will come for, "*...the Lord will not reject his people; He will never forsake his inheritance.*" [vr. 14]

**While we wait, we remember the past and we look to the future.** Through the readings this week we are reminded of the Old Testament call for the Messiah to usher in the kingdom of peace and the New Testament call to watch and wait for the Second Coming of Christ as King.

Most of us are not very good at waiting. Christmas trees go up once Halloween pumpkins are made into pies. A gift, not so carefully hidden, is impatiently prodded in an effort to reveal its contents. We prefer instant satisfaction and impatiently wait in the grocery line, the doctor's office, the hair salon, the stop light.

We discount the past and put off planning for the future, preferring to consider what is. The Advent season with its emphasis on waiting asks us to consider the past, present and the future. Advent also symbolizes our spiritual journey of individuals as we affirm that Christ has come, that He is present in the world today, and that He will come again in power.

Persecuted, abused and battered by enemies, with only a rag tag remnant left, the Israelites longed for a Savior. In this dark place God speaks through the prophet Isaiah, "*Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.*" Later, Isaiah affirms God's promise of a redeemer king to come from the line of Jesse [father of King David] over whom the Spirit of God would hover. [Isaiah **11:1-10**] This Spirit will bring wisdom and understanding, righteousness and justice. The knowledge and presence of God will permeate the earth.

**For this we also wait!** As we read Jesus' alarming words in Luke 21, describing a world closer to real life than the images we often associate with the season we, too, long for the Saviour King's avenging presence to make our lives safe, and to bring righteousness and justice.

**While we wait, reflecting on what God has done and will do, we see the present more clearly, and in slowing down we begin to tune into the invisible and connect it to the visible.**

*God of all hope, in Jesus your salvation  
broke into our world, and his return  
gives purpose to our living in this  
broken world. Make me ready for that  
day when he comes again with great  
glory and majesty to judge the living  
and the dead, renewing and cleansing  
this tired world making everything new.  
Make me ready for that future day by  
living hopefully today. In the name of  
our soon arriving Saviour, amen.*

*[Belgic Confession, Article 37]*

ADVENT WEEK 4

ISAIAH 9:2-7; HEB. 1:1-4; LUKE 2:1-20,  
PHIL. 2:5-11; PSALM 8

## INCARNATION

Browsing through a music store recently, I came across the sheet music for the song *Mary, did you know?* by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene. In a fit of inspiration I bought it, entertained with the idea that I would someday learn to play it. In the meantime, considering my halting piano skills, I've come to meditate for a rather long time on each phrase as I try to figure out the next note.

The idea that a holy God, whom I cannot see or touch, came to earth as a flesh and blood man, is a concept that blows my finite mind. And yet, it's an integral part of my faith. So I wrestle with it.

Lowry originally wrote the song for a church Christmas play as a series of questions he would like to ask Mary, the mother of Jesus. The enormity of the Creator of the Universe coming to rest in the fragile confines of a human baby is such a difficult idea to grasp, and Lowry manages to capture so much of the tension and awesomeness between Majesty and humanness.

We don't know how old Mary was when she gave birth to Jesus but, in the culture of her time, she was probably very young. She was away from her mother, her home and everything that was familiar to her. When she gazed down at that tiny, fragile, precious face of her little boy, her first born child, what was she thinking? "*Mary, did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod, and when you've kissed your little baby, you've kissed the face of God...*"

To a young girl brought up in a devout Jewish home she was steeped in the traditions of her people. They had been crying out for a Saviour for more than 400 years. And now... "*the sleeping Child you're holding is the great I AM.*"

We are in awe of the enormity of a God who continually thinks out of the box...who knew... who knows... that the fragile people He fashioned in His image desperately needed... and still need... a Saviour. Someone who is both God and man to die for our sins so that we might be forgiven and reconciled with our Father.

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?  
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?  
Did you know that your baby boy was Heaven's perfect Lamb?*

Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your Name in all the earth...





EVERYTHING GOD DOES MATERIALIZES INTO THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE  
CHRIS READ

Have you ever prayed, asking God to do something in your life, and instead of God showing up, it was just a human?

- "God I'm lonely" and someone shows up who needs a friend. It may not even occur to you that this was God acting on your behalf.
- "God I need someone to love" and then you meet him\ her, and when you meet them you think it's you that's winning them over. You don't see what God is doing behind the scenes.
- "God I need a job but my skill set is limited" and someone else at the same time is praying "God I need an employee that has a narrow skill set" and all of a sudden you meet. What are the chances that out of 7 Billion on this planet, that the job that needs you, and the you that needs the job, happen to step into the same moment?

Have you ever thought that God materializes His love for you and his concern for you through people?  
That God always incarnates himself through humans?

**Visiting God,  
eclipse my doubts and  
questions with the  
brightness of your  
presence,  
and like Mary,  
overshadow my life with  
your Holy Spirit,  
conceiving in me a true  
faith that receives Jesus  
Christ,  
making him my own  
and me  
your favoured one.  
Amen.**

**(Belgic Confession 22)**