

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths” (Lk 3:4). Advent is a time of prayerful preparation that runs counter to the culture we live in. There is a focus on shopping, holiday parties, and family gatherings that require much time and attention. Amidst this sea of busyness, God calls us to prayer, penitence, and preparation for his second coming. 2000 years ago, Jesus came as a child in Bethlehem. When he comes a second time, Jesus will judge the living and the dead. With each Advent as we long for that second coming, we also focus on a third coming ... Christ coming into our hearts this Christmas.ⁱ

Amidst all of the hustle and bustle, we must find time to slow down and listen to our Lord as he calls us to holiness. Reflecting on the mysteries of our faith can help us to do just that. “Listening and meditation are nourished by silence... One drawback of a society dominated by technology and the mass media is the fact that silence becomes increasingly difficult to achieve. Just as moments of silence are recommended in the Liturgy, so too in the recitation of the Rosary it is fitting to pause briefly after listening to the word of God, while the mind focuses on the content of a particular mystery.”ⁱⁱ

“The contemplation of Christ has an incomparable model in Mary.”ⁱⁱⁱ Betrothed to her husband Joseph but not yet living together in one home, Mary gathered daily with Joseph to pray. They prayed for the long awaited first coming of the Messiah. There was an air of anticipation, a sense that God called them to prayer, penitence, and preparation to help make ready the way for his imminent coming. Much to her surprise, the Angel Gabriel came and asked Mary to be the Mother of God. “In the months that followed she began to sense his presence and to picture his features. When at last she gave birth to him in Bethlehem, her eyes were able to gaze tenderly on the face of her Son, as she ‘wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger’ (Lk 2:7)”^{iv}. Advent invites you to be like Mary and more deeply accept Christ into your life, in the here and now.

During Advent we dress the church in purple ... the color of repentance. “It reminds us of the sober and somber character of the season and tells us that we should be preparing not just our homes, not just our surroundings, but our souls.”^v In Luke’s Gospel, John the Baptist reminds us of our need for confession. “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.” John the Baptist calls us to produce good fruit as the evidence of our repentance (Lk 3:8). “Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise” (3:11).

We listen not only to John but Jesus as well. “Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, calls to conversion and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust: the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which he has entrusted to his Church.”^{vi} In a world, where people increasingly lash out in violence to express frustration, Jesus calls us to love our enemy and to forgive them their trespasses as he has first forgiven us. Again ... silence and contemplation are necessary to hear that whispering voice calling us to sacrifice for the good of others.

“Advent is a season ultimately of light and we see that in the candles of the Advent wreath.”^{vii} Our days grow shorter throughout the month of December leading up to Christmas, but the candles of our advent wreath provide more light even as they grow shorter and shorter. In the midst of a world darkened by sin and selfishness, the candles remind us that God never abandons us. In our darkest hour, the light of Christ burns brightly to lead us out of any difficulty.

We know not the hour nor the day when the Lord will come again. Over 1600 years ago, the holy deacon Saint Ephrem taught: “He has kept those things hidden so that we may keep watch, each of us thinking that he will come in our own day. If he had revealed the time of his coming, his coming would have lost its savor: it would no longer be an object of yearning for the nations and the age in which it will be revealed. He promised that he would come but did not say when he would come, and so all generations and ages await him eagerly.”^{viii} Like Mary praying for the coming of the Messiah, we too are called to be both vigilant and hopeful in our own prayer.

“Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior, and for you I wait all the day” (Ps 25:4-5). How does Jesus want you to build his Kingdom here on earth? How does Jesus want you to make the world a better place for all longing for an end to the pandemic? How does Jesus want you to share his light with others?

Like Saint Paul, “This is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” (Phil 1:9-10).

ⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/news/249700/the-meanings-and-traditions-of-advent-2021

ⁱⁱ Rosarium Virginis Mariae, # 31.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, # 10.

^{iv} Ibid, #10.

^v Ibid, Advent 2021.

^{vi} Ibid, RVM #21.

^{vii} Ibid, Advent 2021.

^{viii} Office of Readings: From a commentary on the Diatessaron by Saint Ephrem, deacon (Cap. 18, 15-17: SC 121, 325-328).