

Advent Ignatian Retreat 2022

THIRD WEEK: PREPARING A WELCOME

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once observed that celebrating Advent means being able to wait and that waiting is an art our impatient age has forgotten. This week we explore different ways of thinking about the waiting Advent invites us to.

Grace for the Week: This week I pray for the grace to know how I am being called to wait and to prepare to welcome Jesus more deeply into my heart.

Day One of Third Week

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"

And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

"Then the angel departed from her." Mary has nine months ahead of her after the angel leaves her. Spend time with her during these months. Be with her as she waits.

What is the waiting like for Mary? What does she think? What does she feel? Is she fearful? Excited? Expectant?

What do you learn from her about waiting?

Day Two of Third Week

Today you are invited to pray with T.S Eliot's poem, *The Journey of the Magi*. As you sit with the poem, enter into the scene it describes. It is said that the journey from where the Magi likely had been living would have been about 1,110 km (690 miles). It would have taken the quite some time to get to Bethlehem. Be with them, talk with them. Learn from them.

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sorefooted, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
and running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

What was that long trip like for the Magi? What was the waiting like?

What kept them going?

Day Three of Third Week

Marina McCoy identifies three characteristics of Advent waiting. Each of today and your next two days of prayer will explore one of those three characteristics. Today's prayer explores Advent waiting as *expectant*. McCoy writes

Many years ago, when I was expecting my first child, I felt a deep connection to Mary in the Nativity stories. As I noticed my stomach beginning to swell, awaited feeling the first kicks, and wondered what it would mean to become a mother, I waited with an expectation of something beautiful ahead. I did not know exactly what to expect and could not possibly have anticipated the way that motherhood would turn my life upside down in a most wonderful way. This experience helps me to think about expectation in Advent. I wait expectantly for the Christ Child to come again, but I do not know the form that the appearance will take. I wait with an anticipation that it will be something wonderful and maybe surprising. Will it be a gift in prayer? A moment holding a real baby? An encounter with family or friends where we know Christ is present among us? Only God knows.

What does expectant waiting look like?

As you recall past moments where you waited expectantly, what was your anticipation like?

Day Four of Third Week

Today's prayer explores Advent waiting as *requiring making space*. McCoy writes

Although the main action in Advent is God's, I have my part to do too. I am not waiting passively for God to act. Rather, I have to make room for God's action to be something that I can welcome, something that I can pay attention to when it happens. Here the images of the inn and stable are helpful. There was no room at the inn for Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, because it was too full. The stable was poor and simple but had space for them to take shelter. Is my heart open to God? What are the superficial concerns or worries to let go, in order to make room for Jesus to come again this Christmas? Is my life too

rushed and busy with holiday preparations, or am I building in time to make space for the Christ Child?

How do you respond to the questions raised in McCoy's reflection? What do you need to let go of in order to make space?

Day Five of Third Week

Today's prayer explores Advent waiting as *hopeful*. McCoy writes

As this part of the world moves deeper into winter, I can find the shortened days and longer nights to be, well, dark and sometimes aching. John's Gospel, though, tells us, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). God has already given us the one who loves, redeems, and heals the world. Indeed, for us, unlike for Mary and Joseph, Jesus has already come into the world. We have the experience of the entire Church community who has encountered the living Christ before us to give us hope. We also have our own individual past experiences of where God has been present. God's light and love always shine through whatever kinds of darkness that we might encounter: illness, grief, injustice, worries about work or relationships, spiritual aridity or darkness. So, we wait with hope. We wait with one another and not alone.

How do you articulate the hope you carry during this Advent?

What does it mean to you to wait in joyful hope?

How are you called to share that hope?

Day Six of Third Week Repetition

In the Spiritual Exercises, repetition is an invitation to go back over a prayer experience in order to allow for deeper appropriation of the particular mystery. It is not repeating the material in sense of going back and looking for something new. Instead you want to return to the points where you experienced the greatest movement allowing yourself to savor, deepen and better appreciate the experience, allowing it to be reinforced.

So on this last day, simply return to the moment in one of your prior prayer periods this week where you felt the greatest movement toward or away from God. The place of deepest affect. Go back there and see what else God wants to share with you.

Day Seven of Third Week Review of the Week

On the last day of each week during the retreat, you are invited to review and pray back over your journal for the preceding days of prayer this week. As you do, consider

Where was I most moved?

What was God's presence like?

What do I want to share in my small group?