

Getting in the Mood: A Season of Wonder and Promise

How do we get into the “mood” for Advent? Maybe I could put it another way: What is the “mood” of Advent? I thought about that this week and I came up with a few ideas; here’s two I really liked. What do you think?

The “mood” of Advent” is like Nature silently announcing the coming dawn in the time between dark night and the first rays of the sun beyond the horizon. In that moment of wonder, the world, stilled in awe, is perched on the brink of a new day.

Or

The “mood” of Advent is like a pregnant woman, in quiet communion with the life within her, treasuring the intimacy of a new relationship, and yet yearning for the promise of holding a new life in her arms and presenting it to the world.

These images are very much the themes of the Season of Advent. They speak of a spirit, an attitude, that transcends the material and the commercial. They invite reflection not busyness, simplicity not extravagance.

These images of wonder and promise are in stark contrast to the near hysteric “hustle and bustle” which has become part of our culture’s

preparation for the celebration of Christmas. Today's liturgy invites us to understand the difference and choose the former.

It's not that we can't be joyful in our anticipation. In fact, we might be misled by the purple vestments worn in Advent. Even most Advent wreaths miss the mark. This is not a penitential season. The color best representing this season would be within the blue-purple spectrum, such as periwinkle, the color of the sky as the dawn approaches. It is a color of joyful anticipation.

As the beginning of a new church year, the season of Advent is not unlike January, named after the Roman god Janus who is often depicted as having two faces; one looks back at the past, while the other looks forward to the future. Advent does much the same for us. Our Advent Scriptures will take us back into our Hebraic roots and, in turn, bring us into the promise of a New Creation when

*one nation shall not raise the sword against another,
nor shall they train for war again.*

Our celebration of this season of promise also has the cautionary tone of Matthew's Gospel. Rather than attempting to frighten, it is an appeal to stay focused. A New Creation, the Day of the Lord, is evolving.

Therefore, stay awake!

For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

We cannot be unmoved or unaware of the mystery of Christ's coming. As mystery, it is relatively unpredictable. But it is also a promise which demands that we prepare appropriately. Unfortunately, the chaos that surrounds us today can distract and delude us.

The quiet wonder of the dawning of new day is threatened by the prospect of abandoning a long-held culture of welcome by establishing policies that would rather seek to shelter the rich and do further violence to the poor.

The serenity of the pregnant woman is interrupted by a church and a society increasingly exclusive in its maleness, its whiteness, and its lopsided power structure.

Advent is not just about preparing for the Feast of Christmas. It is also about preparing ourselves and our society for the Christ's second coming in glory. Advent invites us to see in hunger and poverty the invitation to find simple ways to insure a fuller sharing of the gifts of God's creation with all people.

Advent moves us to work for a public policy that turns swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Advent is a time to challenge both society and the church to reject once and for all discrimination in all its forms and to promote the God-given equality of every human being.

We can transform these hectic days of shopping and partying by staying focused on the wonder and promise of Advent. We begin around the altar at this Sunday Eucharist. It is here that we see in this present celebration both a memorial of Christ's one perfect act of love as well as the foretaste of an Eternal Banquet. In these next four weeks, you and I have the opportunity not to rush this season, but just as we do in this Eucharistic celebration, come to contemplate it, to savor it, and to delight in its wonder so its promise can be fulfilled.