

# Pondering the joy and mystery of the incarnation during Advent



## Advent—Praying without Words

Advent calls for a certain contemplative 'inactivity' in the midst of the hustle and bustle that so often precedes the celebration of Christmas: it invites us to rest and be thankful as we come before God in wordless prayer. ...

When we enter this quiet zone, we can reflect on the coming of the Word of God, not just in history, but in the world of today. As we wait for that coming this Christmas, we will surely see that 'the kindness and love of God' (Titus 3:4) are still being revealed: amid the sadness, turmoil and confusion that surround us on every front, there is a light shining in the darkness.

The gospels offer many mini-portraits of people who recognised the need for quiet if God's Word was to be heard: John the Baptist, living a hidden life in the desert; Simeon and Anna, who never left the Temple, spending their days in fasting and prayer; Nathanael, taking 'time out' under a fig tree; the woman of Samaria, isolated by her immoral reputation, drawing water in her bucket at the well of Sychar. ...

Above all, it is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who most fully embodies the Advent spirit of quiet listening. Little in the eyes of the world of her time, unknown, unimportant, she is 'the faithful one, whose mind is steadfast' (Isaiah 26:3). Attuned to God's silence, her inner gaze is fixed on God as she humbly waits for the Lord. Mary's faith, her openness to God, lead her to the prayer of acceptance of what God is asking of her.

Mary was one of those people the Jews called 'the Quiet in the Lord', the *Anawim*, who lived a life of unceasing prayer and serene watchfulness. They had no dramatic expectations of a Messiah who would come in power and glory, instead, in humility and faith, they waited quietly for the day when God would comfort his people. And they were among the few who recognised and welcomed God's Son when he came.

If, like Mary, we have the courage to be quiet in God's presence, we will hear an echo of the Advent message: the Lord is very near!

**Sr Teresa White** (Faithful Companions of Jesus)  
*The Tablet*, 17 Dec 22, p. 7

Ever-inviting God,  
Your voice speaks to us across all ages  
Engaging us in your promise of freedom and joy.  
Grace these Advent days  
That we may hear your word with new insight,  
And follow the Way which opens before us.  
For we long for Christ's coming with hope  
And await your enlightening spirit.  
Amen.



And a little  
child shall  
lead them.

*Isaiah 11:6*



**Advent Mary**, Jacques Bourgault

And Mary said,  
'My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of  
his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call  
me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

*Luke 1:46-50*



And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.

Luke 1:56

Mary and Elizabeth, like all pregnant women, had many months to ponder the miracle of the baby they each held within them. Waiting requires us to be patient. Just as a pregnant woman can't 'hurry up' the growth of her unborn babe but must wait nine months for the time of birth to arrive, so we are called to be patient as we wait and listen, within and around us, for the voice of the Holy Spirit during this blessed time.

*Church of the Visitation, Ein Karem, Israel*



*John Garratt 2022 Advent Calendar, image for 15 December, (iStock: whitemay).*

Christmas cards first came into being in England in 1846, just a few years after the death of Catherine McAuley. The card at left, a few decades later, was printed in 1874 in England—artist unknown. Its focus on **the Cross of Christ as the door of mercy** is striking.

In our era, we are unlikely to have ever seen a Christmas card that includes the cross or refers to mercy, yet even the very first Christmas card in 1846 (*not pictured*) showed contrasting images of a family celebration in the centre and works of mercy—clothing the naked and feeding the hungry—on the side panels.

**To ponder:** What response does this card evoke in you? The words and the image? The connection of Christmas and the Cross?

In the article on the previous page, Sr Teresa writes: “As we wait for that coming this Christmas, we will surely see that ‘the kindness and love of God’ (*Titus 3:4*) are still being revealed: amid the sadness, turmoil and confusion that surround us on every front, there is a light shining in the darkness.”

**To ponder:** The Mercy Associates **Vision Statement** states: “**we witness to our faith in prayer and action,** giving expression to God’s mercy under the guidance of the Holy Spirit ... in response to the needs of these times ... in the ordinariness of our daily lives ... and in right relationship with all of creation.”

Mercy and kindness are related. Reflect on ways, in the ordinariness of your everyday life, that you are alert and active to being a vessel of God’s mercy to those you encounter. Recall a moment in the last week or two where you’ve sensed a need and responded to it... when faith has turned into action.

## REJOICE .....be filled with JOY!

Let everything that holds darkness for you, be filled with LIGHT.

Let everything that hurries within you, be filled with SLOW.

Let everything that binds you be filled with RELEASE.

Let everything that frightens you be filled with COURAGE.

Let everything that stresses you, be filled with CALM.

Joy, Light, Slow, Release, Courage, Calm...from our hearts and our prayer, may these be your blessings during Advent.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Jamberoo Abbey, Facebook, 13 Dec 2020