



# Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Advent | December 3, 2017

## Getting Ready for Christ

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**W**hen my mother became pregnant with my youngest sister, I was old enough to be involved with the preparations for her birth. We added a crib to the room she would share, and we gathered clothes and toys suitable for an infant. I wasn't sure we'd get everything ready in time, and it seemed like forever before she arrived.

We didn't know exactly when Mom would go into labor, but when she did, we each had a job to do at home while my father took her to the hospital. I was overjoyed when my mother brought my sister home just before Christmas.

### Sunday Readings

**Isaiah 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7**

We are the clay and you our potter: we are all the work of your hand.

**1 Corinthians 1:3–9**

God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son.

**Mark 13:33–37**

[Jesus said,] "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come."

Advent is the Church's time to prepare for new birth. My family had nine months to get ready for my sister. The Church calendar gives us only four short weeks to make our hearts ready to receive Christ. How do we do that? The Scriptures help us by recalling both the promise of his coming and the exhortation to stay awake because we don't know when it will happen.

How odd, we might think. Christmas is always on December 25—of course we know when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. What we have to remember is that while Christmas honors Jesus' birth at a particular time and place more than two thousand years ago, it also reminds us that Christ is alive today, waiting for us to open our hearts to him. It reminds us that Christ is coming again and that we don't want to be caught napping when he does.

We also prepare by taking extra time to pray, to practice kindness and service, and to remember those in need.

Where will Christ be born in you this Christmas? Will you be ready? +

*Christmas is a celebration and a reminder.*

## A Word From Pope Francis

The Lord comes...into our life as a liberator; he comes to free us from all forms of interior and exterior slavery. It is he who shows us the path of faithfulness, of patience and of perseverance because, upon his return, our joy will be overflowing. Christmas is near,...[and] outward signs invite us to welcome the Lord who always comes and knocks at our door, knocks at our heart, in order to draw near to us.

—Angelus, December 11, 2016



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I believe there is a limited time to my life on earth?
- Since I do not know when Jesus will come again, isn't peaceful awareness of his eventual return the smartest attitude?



# Living the Liturgical Year

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

**O**ur Catholic identity is shaped by the way we read the Bible. And we read the Bible in a special way: It's called the liturgical year, with today being the first Sunday of that new year.

This annual cycle of feasts and seasons is not primarily about decorations (when to bring out the poinsettias and when to display the lilies). Nor is it simply a way to add variety to the Mass so that it isn't repetitive (some days the priest wears green, other days, purple). The liturgical year is about much more all-inclusive issues. The liturgical year enable us to celebrate the whole mystery of Christ.

The Bible is our living contact with the mystery of Christ. The way we Catholics officially read Scripture creates our liturgical year. For example, the day on which we read the resurrection account becomes Easter; the day on which we proclaim Christ's birth becomes Christmas Day.

The original, most important Catholic feast day is Sunday—the Lord's day. Jews find identity in Sabbath rest; Muslims, in Jumuah, the Friday prayer. We Catholics find identity in the Sunday eucharistic assembly. The Bible emphasizes the bond between the Lord's day and the Lord's Supper. While our contemporary understanding of Sunday has incorporated elements of Sabbath rest, Sunday retains its original meaning as

a day of assembly. On the Lord's day we gather with fellow Catholics and celebrate his paschal victory, the Eucharist.

## Rich Biblical Tradition

At Mass on Sundays and holy days, during a three-year cycle the Church proclaims some 500 passages of the Bible, from each book of the Old and New Testaments. The Church year enables us to hear from all of Scripture.

There are two ways in which the Church decides which passages of the Bible to proclaim. Imagine one of your favorite novels, books of poetry, or inspirational essays. You might read from beginning to end. Or, especially after you are familiar with the book, you might pick out certain passages that correspond to a situation you are experiencing.

The Church reads the Bible in both of these ways. On some Sundays the Church selects the passages based on their theme. This manner of selection creates the liturgical seasons of Easter and Christmas. On the other Sundays the Church reads various books of the Bible from beginning to end in a continuous fashion.

The liturgy enables us to pass from our past-present-future time frame to enter into God's time of salvation so that the grace and mystery proclaimed in the Scripture readings are made present. An

old spiritual asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Yes, I was there! Or, more accurately, I am there now! At the Easter Vigil we sing, "This is the night when Jesus Christ rose triumphant from the grave." We don't sing, "We remember the night long ago when...." We sing, "This is the night!"

## Jesus: Alive Again

We Catholics today are not disappointed because all the wonderful events of Christ's life happened long ago. The liturgical year enables us to be present to those events now. The liturgical year makes the mysteries of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection present in a mysterious way so that Christians of every generation can come into contact with them and be enriched by their graces.

The mystery of Christ is so rich that no single celebration can do it justice. The liturgical year enables us to experience the events of Christ in a more Catholic, all-embracing way so that we can enter into these mysteries and be enriched by God's saving love. +



Lord, I have become distracted by the things of this world. Guide my steps and lead me safely back home to you. Help me to respond to the needs of others.

*From Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas,*

Rev. Warren J. Savage  
and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

December 4-9

Mon. Advent Weekday:  
Is 2:1-5 / Mt 8:5-11  
Tue. Advent Weekday:  
Is 11:1-10 / Lk 10:21-24  
Wed. Advent Weekday:  
Is 25:6-10a / Mt 15:29-37

Thu. St. Ambrose: Is 26:1-6 / Mt 7:21, 24-27  
Fri. Immaculate Conception of Mary:  
Gn 3:9-15, 20 / Eph 1:3-6, 11-12 / Lk 1:26-38  
Sat. Advent Weekday: Is 30:19-21, 23-26 / Mt 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8