

Waiting with Purpose 2022



Advent.

Once a year the chance
to wait with purpose.

Makes a change.

– Carolyn Morris





In our waiting ...

God, we come to you in our waiting.

We wait with our fears,
our anxieties and frustrations,
our pains and regrets,
our shame and confusion.
God, help us to wait in peace.

We wait with impatience:
We rush around, preparing for festivities,
not leaving space to prepare our hearts.
God, help us to wait in faith.

We wait in excitement:
We are ready to celebrate!
We know the story
with its humbleness, simplicity and wonder.
God, help us to wait in joy.

We wait in thanksgiving:
We are free and able to celebrate.
We have others around us to share in the journey.
We are able to wonder at the marvel of your gift.
God, help us to receive your love.

– Katrina Crosby



Introduction

Advent. Once a year, the chance to wait with purpose.

Waiting is part of the human condition, we wait in line to be served, in traffic queues for the light to turn green, for many this is an exercise of frustration. While this time of the year can be coined as the silly season as people rush to purchase the perfect gift, we often lose sight of the true purpose of Advent.

If COVID 19 has taught us anything it is that we need to slow down so we can focus on what is important in life. This time has allowed us to consider what provides meaning and purpose to life and what principles guide us as disciples.

On 12 November we came together for a Diocesan Reflection Day on our Spiritual Foundations marking the anniversary of Bishop Bill death.

As we continue our synodal journey through Advent we invite you to a period of waiting through connecting with each other in prayer, reflection and our guiding principles. Unlike the uncertainty that so many have experienced over the last two years, we know as Christians that our waiting in anticipation for the birth of Christ has purpose.

Over four weeks this resource provides the opportunity for us to encounter the mystery of Christ present in the Advent Gospels and our rich Catholic tradition. We are invited to encounter, recall, reflect, share, connect and consider how we will live differently as a result of what we have experienced.

By being together with our stories, our questions, our open hearts, and minds, we can form a community that lifts, honours, and learns from each other.

Let us wait with purpose this Advent so we can continue to build the Kingdom of God together.

Rose McAllister

Manager Formation and Education
Pastoral Ministries
Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
October 2022.

The Process of Mystagogical Reflection

Please refer to the accompanying document which introduces Mystagogical Reflection and explains the process.

Invitation

The person guiding the group invites people into the process based on the following invitation.

Listen to God say to you ... *Be still and know that I am God* (Ps 46:10)

Moved by the Holy Spirit in response we pray ...

Open my/our ears to the Word of God ...

Open my/our heart(s) to the love of God ...

Open my/our mind(s) to the wisdom of God ...

Let us listen for the words of everlasting life ...

Mystagogical Reflection (Sunday Gospel)

Each step finishes in silence before the guide invites the group into the next step ...

- 1. Encounter** with Christ in the Word proclaimed ... listen ...
- 2. Recollection:** What happened?
An Invitation to recall what happened in the text. No interpretation, just what happened. The detail is important.
- 3. Reflection:** What did you notice – what word or phrase captures your attention?
What did you experience/feel? How does this relate to your life experience?
What meaning is God revealing to you?
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter.
- 4. Faith sharing:** How is the meaning found in your encounter with Christ in the scripture connecting with the season of Advent? How are we being invited to know Christ more deeply and live more faithfully through our Diocesan Foundational Guiding Principles?
An invitation to connect your experience and the meaning you have found in it, with what Christ is revealing in the living tradition of our Catholic faith.
- 5. Connection:** Why does what Christ has revealed to us matter now?
An invitation to consider what it means to live from Christ.
- 6. Conversion:** How will you live differently as a result of what you have experienced?
What is dying? What is being raised up?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God.

Our Foundational **Guiding Principles**

We the people of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle are followers of Jesus Christ. We form a community, who come together to worship God and to be nourished by God's Word and Eucharist. We are sent out to proclaim the Good News of God's love and to live the commandment, 'love one another as I have loved you.' (Jn 15:12).

This compels us to live by the following principles:

1. At the Heart of Everything is Jesus Christ

We strive to live according to the example and teachings of Jesus and to foster God's reign of love in our hearts and in our world.

2. A Community that Worships and Serves

We gather in prayer and worship to unite us with Jesus and with one another and to empower us for mission and service.

3. Unity in Diversity

We value and uphold our unity and the rich diversity of gifts and ministries which complement one another for the building up of all.

4. Right and Duty to Participate

Through Baptism we have the right and duty to participate in the life of the church as co-responsible disciples journeying together on mission.

5. Leadership for Mission

Following the example of Jesus, we exercise humble servant leadership and governance which makes credible our participation in Jesus' mission to proclaim God's love for all to all.

6. Dialogue and Discernment

We recognise the Holy Spirit in one another and listen for the Spirit's voice in respectful dialogue. We make decisions by seeking to discern the mind and will of God revealed through the working of the Holy Spirit in us as community.

7. Renewal and Faith Development

We acknowledge our need as a church to be continuously renewed and reformed and as individuals to pursue faith development throughout our lives.

8. Action Seeking Justice

We uphold the fundamental equality, dignity and rights of every person grounding our work for the common good, care of the earth and care of the needy.

9. Reading the Signs of the Times

We strive to identify God's presence and message in the events and realities of the world around us including the rich heritage of the First Nations Peoples.

10. Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

We work for unity among all Christians. We respect the beliefs of others, and we reverence the common humanity of all people.



”

Contemplation is not a technique to be mastered
but a journey inside ourselves
to become one with what already is.”

– *Daniel O’Leary*

Pattern for Gathering

Whether gathering online or physically, each gathering will follow the following pattern:

1. Gathering

Draw people together, ensuring everyone is introduced by name as necessary and that they have a copy of the participant resource with the reading and the Mystagogical Reflection process.

Identify someone who will proclaim the reading.

2. Invitation

3. Proclamation of the reading

4. Mystagogical Reflection finishing in silent contemplation

5. Final Prayer/Blessing

A prayer and blessing are provided for each week. You may like to use something else or pray in response to the moment.

6. Thank you

And a reminder of the arrangements for the next gathering.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light pink top and dark shorts, is sitting on dark, jagged rocks by the sea. She is looking out at the ocean towards a sunset. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of blue, orange, and pink. The water is calm, reflecting the light from the sky. A white rectangular box with a thin blue border is overlaid on the center of the image, containing a quote in blue text.

***God waits silently
in our inner recesses,
the chambers of our soul,
gazing lovingly
on our treasure,
awaiting our response.***

– Yvonne Morland



**Advent Gospels
& Reflections**



First Sunday of Advent (27 November)

Reflection by Greg Sunter

The first Sunday of Advent sees the commencement of the new liturgical year. This new liturgical cycle is referred to as Year A and features the gospel of Matthew. (Year B features the gospel of Mark and Year C, that we have just completed, features the gospel of Luke.) Advent comes from the Latin word *Adventus* which literally means ‘coming’; it is also reflected in the Greek word *Parousia*, which is used to describe the second coming of Jesus. So Advent is a time of preparation and anticipation of the coming of Christ into the world that is celebrated in the Nativity at Christmas. The gospel passage chosen for today’s reading richly expresses that anticipation and need for preparation.

It may seem a little confusing that we begin our year-long exploration of the gospel of Matthew by taking a reading from chapter 24. However, the need for readiness and alertness that Jesus speaks about in relation to the coming of the Kingdom is equally suitable for a modern audience when preparing to celebrate once again the coming of Jesus into the world. Jesus is the best expression of the Kingdom that we have yet experienced and so rather than seeing the choice of this passage as a confusion, we should recognise the alignment that exists between the anticipation of the Kingdom and the anticipation of the Nativity.

The two great feasts of Christianity – the Nativity and Easter – are each preceded by a period of preparation: Advent and Lent. The emphasis of these seasons is on the mental and spiritual preparation to fully enter into one of the great mysteries of faith. In the Nativity, we celebrate God become human; God present in the world in a physical way. Advent is a time to remember the many and varied ways that God continues to be present in the world.

Jesus draws a parallel between the people in Noah’s time and the people of his own time. What it reflects is a complacency that periodically overtook the Jewish people. When the people bound themselves to God in covenant their lives gradually became better. Inevitably, their lives improved to such a state that they forgot God was responsible for their blessings. They ignored their relationship with God and became complacent about their good fortune. Ultimately, their comfort was brought to an end and they recognised once again their need for God. Jesus calls the people to get ready because the pattern is repeating itself.

The teachings and sayings of Jesus reveal him to be a clever public speaker and storyteller. His use of imagery and language captivated the imagination of his audience. However, we have tended to endow his every word with awesome significance and layers of meaning. Today’s reading is an example where Jesus used a confronting image simply to gain his audience’s attention. He does not intend to suggest that God sneaks up on us like a burglar and is seeking to catch us out. The image conveys the need to prepare for what might happen unexpectedly.

One of the major symbols of the Advent season is the wreath. The encircling wreath is symbolic of God without beginning or end and the green foliage represents our hope in God. There are usually five candles in the wreath, a central white candle representing the light of Christ that came into the world and then four outside candles that are usually purple and rose coloured. The first candle is generally symbolic of Hope and Expectation. The third candle – the rose or pink candle – celebrates the Joy that is anticipated in the coming of Christ. The progressive lighting of the candles marks the journey towards the Nativity.



First Sunday of Advent (27 November)

Gathering

Invitation (p. 5)

Gospel (Mt 24:37-44)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

Blessing

We are pilgrims always

Journeying homewards

May God walk with us along the roads.

We look for peace

And we cry for justice

May God make us peacemakers all our days

We wait and long for the coming of Jesus.

May God fill us with wonder and with great hope.

May the Bright God of Peace bless us,

Creator, Redeemer and Holy Spirit. Amen



Second Sunday of Advent (4 December)

Reflection by Greg Sunter

When John the Baptist performed baptism it was for the forgiveness of sin. The baptism he gave was a mark of the desire to enter into a new life of right action. It was not a baptism of initiation into community that is the case today. John had two key words that he is recorded as preaching: repent and prepare. His call for repentance was a call to turn away from sin; a call to have a change of heart; a call to turn one's life around and make a fresh start. His call for preparation is in the long line of prophets that includes the great prophet Isaiah from whom we take today's first reading. All of the prophets urged the people towards hope in the future. Isaiah and others spoke specifically of a person – a Messiah – who would bring that hope to reality. But the tradition demanded a readiness for the Messiah and that was the call to preparation that John the Baptist echoed at the beginning of the public life of Jesus.

John's taunting of the Pharisees and Sadducees is an indication of this need for preparation and readiness. He accuses them of being too confident of their own rightness. He demands proof from them of their honest repentance: 'but if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit'. Rather, he suspects that they think that salvation is assured for them by virtue of being a Jew; a son of Abraham. He warns them that an axe hangs poised to cut down any part of the Jewish tradition that is failing to produce good fruit. This is a theme that is picked up later by Jesus himself; you can't be complacent about your own position, you have to welcome the new truth revealed by Jesus and give yourself wholeheartedly to God.

John the Baptist's call to 'Prepare the way of the Lord' is a summary of the purpose of the season of Advent. Every year, as we celebrate the Nativity, we celebrate once again the presence of God in our world. God became incarnate in the world through Jesus but also always was and continues to be incarnate in the world through each person. If we are to accept this reality and live it out, we need to remind ourselves this Advent to prepare the way for the Lord to be present in and through us every day of our lives.

The wilderness holds a special place in scripture. Time spent in the wilderness is associated with a time of preparation for undertaking a special purpose. When Moses led the people from Egypt they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. This was a time of renewing themselves after their time in Egypt and rediscovering their covenant with God. After his baptism, Jesus retreats to the wilderness to prepare for his public ministry. It was also out of the wilderness that a lot of rebellion and unrest emerged. A desire for change and action is what comes out of the wilderness.

The gospel of Matthew in particular casts the Pharisees in a very dim light. John's insult to them, calling them a brood of vipers, is indeed echoed by Jesus later in this gospel. In this gospel, Jesus describes the Pharisees as hypocrites and blind guides. The community for whom this gospel was written were predominantly Jewish Christians. However, at the time of writing serious cracks were appearing in the relationship between the Jewish community and the Christian sect. This gospel aligns closely with the Jewish tradition but is very critical of the inflexibility of the Pharisees.



Second Sunday of Advent (4 December)

Gathering

Invitation (p. 5)

Gospel (Mt 3:1-12)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'

Blessing

We walk in the wilderness searching for meaning.

May God baptise us with Mercy and fire.

We walk in the city thirsting for justice.

May God baptise us with integrity and hope.

We walk towards Bethlehem seeking a Saviour.

May God baptise us with holiness and joy.

And may the blessing of God, our Makers, Saviour and Holy Spirit, come upon us now and remain with us for ever. Amen



Third Sunday of Advent (11 December)

Reflection by Greg Sunter

Why would John the Baptist send messengers to question Jesus? We recall from last week's gospel passage that John had a somewhat 'fire and brimstone' perception of what Jesus would be like. Perhaps as he sat in his prison cell John began to wonder whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah that John believed him to be. Perhaps the question was not for himself but rather for his disciples that he sent to Jesus. Given the answer that Jesus provided them, perhaps John's intention was for the disciples to recognise that Jesus was in fact the one that John had proclaimed and that the disciples should switch their allegiance to Jesus. John probably guessed that he would not be leaving that prison alive and may have been leading his disciples to the next step in their discipleship by having them go and scrutinise Jesus.

The indirect answer that Jesus provides to the query would have not sounded like such a roundabout response as it does to us. The picture Jesus describes of the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers cleansed, and the deaf hearing would have been very familiar to those who were listening and the first audience of this gospel. These were signs of the coming of the Messiah that had been foretold by the prophets. In his answer, Jesus effectively says, 'Well, all the things that are supposed to happen when the Messiah comes are happening now with me. There's your answer!'

The reading continues to build on the Advent themes of anticipation, preparedness and hope. As we draw closer to the celebration of the Nativity, in this reading is confirmation that our hope is not misplaced. Today's readings emphasise the joy that lies in the anticipation and expectation of what is coming.

Jesus declares that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater even than John whom he has just finishing praising as greatest of all men. It is an indication that in the kingdom, things are not as they are on earth. The blind, lame, deaf, poor and lepers that Jesus named earlier would have been seen as the very lowest of society. Their afflictions were seen as punishments from God and so it was assumed that they, or their parents, had done something to deserve this punishment. Jesus rejects this interpretation and shows these people to be the most open to responding to his message.

Jesus is not recorded as asking the messengers about John's wellbeing. He doesn't appear to express any concern about John's imprisonment. Yet Jesus must have felt this situation very deeply. John the Baptist and Jesus were related; they were cousins. The depth of his feeling is reflected when Jesus speaks so positively and powerfully about John. It reads almost as a eulogy that might be given at a funeral; praising the greatness of the deceased. Yet regardless of John's greatness, Jesus assures his audience that even the least in the kingdom is greater than John.

The third Sunday of Advent was traditionally known as Gaudete Sunday. The word, gaudete, (pronounced gow-day-tay) is from Latin and means Rejoice! The name was given to this Sunday because the entrance antiphon for the day is: 'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near.' When Advent was observed as a more penitential season, this third Sunday was a break from the sombre mood and was more celebratory. The rose-coloured candle in the Advent wreath and rose-coloured vestments convey a mood of joy and celebration.



Third Sunday of Advent (11 December)

Gathering

Invitation (p. 5)

Gospel (Mt 11:2-11)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.'

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

Blessing

We have felt the sun and rainfall;

We have watched flowers blossom,

May God bless us in the turning of the earth.

We have read the story of Jesus;

We have found answers to our questions.

May God bless us in the hearing of the scriptures.

We have been met by the Holy Spirit;

Our lives have been changed and challenged.

May God bless us in the living days of our days.

So may God of Joy bless us and nourish us, this day and for evermore. Amen



Fourth Sunday of Advent (18 December)

Reflection by Greg Sunter

We will see throughout the coming liturgical year that the gospel of Matthew places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of the Law and upon its proper application. Indeed, the gospel writer casts Jesus in the role of the 'new Moses' – Moses was the great Law-giver of the Old Testament and Jesus is portrayed in this gospel as bringing a new Law to the people of Israel. In this gospel, the proper application of the Law is as important as the Law itself. In today's passage, Joseph provides an example of the proper application of the Law. His betrothed wife was pregnant; she would have been subject to the Law against adultery and probably would have been stoned to death. Under the Law, Joseph was obliged to divorce her, and yet he determines that he will do so quietly and protect Mary from too much shame and possibly save her life. Joseph did not intend to ignore the Law, but he sought to carry it out in such a way as to bring the least shame and the least hurt to all involved.

The role of Joseph is often overlooked. There is no mention of him during the public ministry of Jesus. In fact the latest mention in any of the gospels is the account of Jesus in the Temple at the age of 12. After that, Joseph disappears and we can only assume that he has passed away by the time Jesus takes up his ministry. Yet Joseph is truly a man of great faith. By rights he should have divorced Mary and walked away. But he trusts in the word of the God that is addressed to him in a dream and from that point on he goes to great lengths to protect and care for his family.

Emmanuel; God-is-with-us – that's what we celebrate through Christmas and that's what we've been preparing for during Advent. We celebrate God-with-us in a particular time and place through our celebration of the birth of Jesus. But we remember it every year because we also use the Christmas celebration to remind ourselves that God continues to be with us. That is what is so remarkable about the Christmas season: that God-is-with-us now, not just in a stable in Palestine so many years ago, but now! Advent is the time to remind ourselves of this incredible truth and prepare ourselves to acknowledge it once again.

It appears from the passage that Mary's child is to be called both Jesus and Emmanuel. Emmanuel is not intended as a different name for Jesus but rather one of the many titles that will be applied to him. The title means God-is-with-us. That one word, Emmanuel, sums up the essence of Jewish and Christian belief. The Jewish people's faith in God was built on the basis that God travelled with them and through their lives. Christians believe that God took on an even closer sense of being with us through God's incarnation in the life of Jesus.

Fourth Sunday of Advent (18 December)

Gathering

Invitation (p. 5)

Gospel (Mt 1:18-24)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son

and they will call him Emmanuel,

a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Blessing

We have walked in the wilderness;

We have waited and wondered.

May God bless us as we wait for a Child's cry.

We have seen injustices;

We have brought God our questions,

May God bless us in darkness and light.

We have been bombarded with the glitter
and tinsel;

We have looked for a Saviour.

May God bless us as Christmas comes near.

Vulnerable God,

Risk-taker, Unborn Child and Holy Spirit,

Bless us with wonder, and justice and hope.

Amen



Acknowledgements

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02 4979 1200
841 Hunter Street
Newcastle West 2302
NSW Australia
www.mn.catholic.org.au