



Bringing Home the Word

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT December 4, 2011

Counting the Days Until Christmas

By Diane M. Houdek

Enamored as we are of datebooks, calendars and to-do lists, it's not surprising that one of the more endearing customs this time of year is that of the Advent calendar. We never quite outgrow the childhood excitement of counting down the days until Christmas, even when it turns into the more stressful reminder of how many shopping days remain.

But the liturgical season of Advent pulls us in a different direction, out of time into a kind of timelessness. The Second Letter of Peter reminds us, "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." Time is a fluid concept, eternity even more so.

Even as we mark the days of Advent in anticipation of the celebration of

Christmas, we are caught in a paradox. Theologians refer to the two comings of Christ as "Already, but not yet."

Born into history over 2,000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth lived and died a limited human life. But we believe that he lives still and will come again in glory at the end of time. We celebrate the first and await the second. But we live our lives in this in-between moment.

In our own lives and within our families, we have a sense of balancing past, present and future. We make choices all the time that have unexpected consequences, leading us in both exciting and daunting directions.

We can't always see what lies ahead of us, but we know that we need to act. It helps if we develop some flexibility, if we can adjust our position to account for changes in the terrain of our lives. Sometimes we need to let go of things that we long held dear in order to make room for new traditions and treasures. Life in the in-between times can be messy, and nowhere is that more amplified than in this busy and stressful holiday time.


On the second Sunday of Advent each year, we encounter John the Baptist, whom Jesus referred to as the greatest of the prophets. His preaching was very much in line with that of the Old Testament prophets.

John the Baptist came preaching a message of repentance and forgiveness

of sins. His role was to encourage people to let go of those things that held them back from a wholehearted embrace of the Messiah.

John's message that the time was at hand referred not to shopping days but to the coming of the kingdom of God, a concept referred to in the Old Testament as the Day of the Lord. Whether this day brought vindication for the righteous or judgment of sinners, there was no question that it was a significant moment.

John had only an inkling of the magnitude of the message Jesus himself would preach. We find hints later in the Gospels that John sometimes struggled to grasp the full significance of the man he heralded. But still he did his part. We are called to do likewise. We need to do less counting and more reflecting. We need fewer to-dos and more time to simply be in God's presence.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of God comforting his people, sheltering them as a shepherd cares for the lambs and ewes in his flock. While we are waiting for the glorious second coming of Christ, the mystery of the incarnation reminds us that God has already transformed our human lives, touching them with the gift of eternity. We can trust that the road ahead of us has already been made straight and smooth. Our shepherd God will clear away the clutter and distractions. 

SUNDAY READINGS

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

God extends words of healing to a weary people. The way is ready for them to come home.

2 Peter 3:8-14

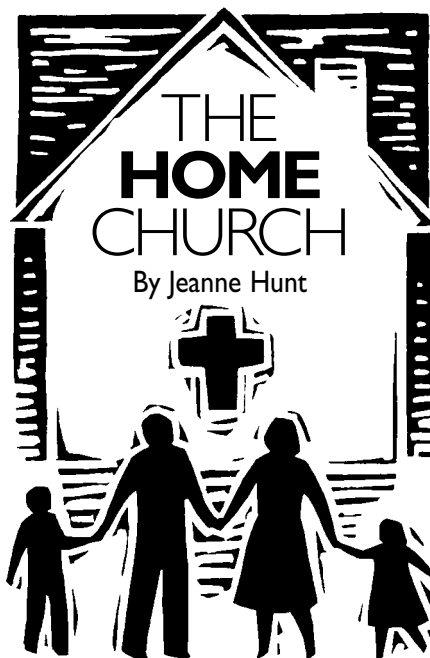
We hear that the day of the Lord will come in God's good time.

Mark 1:1-8

John the Baptist serves as the precursor to Jesus.

REFLECTION
QUESTIONS
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REFLECTION

- Why was John's work in the desert so popular?
- Share a time when repentance was important to you?
- Who have been prophets in your faith journey ?
- How can you prepare the way of the Lord this Advent?



Many Catholics believe the Immaculate Conception means that Jesus was conceived while Mary was a virgin, but this is not what the feast is all about.

Early Christians had a hard time understanding how someone sinful—even someone only guilty of original sin, someone who had never committed an actual willful sin in her life—could possibly be worthy to bear the Savior.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception neatly solves this dilemma. It explains that, indeed, Mary was free from all sin—even the stain of original sin. But, far from meaning that she did not need Jesus, the doctrine explains that her sin was eliminated in anticipation of her cooperation with God in the Incarnation.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception falls on December 8, exactly nine months before we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of Mary. And exactly nine months before Christmas, on March 25, we celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation, when the angel appeared to Mary to announce that she had been chosen to be the Mother of Our Lord.

Adapted from A Catholic Christmas, by Kathleen M. Carroll, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2011.

PRAYER

Long-awaited Savior,
Come into the busy days
of my life once again.
Lead me into a quiet place
and speak to me.
Your words alone
are spirit and life.
Come, Lord Jesus.

Who has prepared the way of the Lord in your life? On this second Sunday of Advent, we are invited into the desert to meet St. John the Baptist. He was a straightforward, no-nonsense prophet who spoke the truth and lost his head in the process. Often, God sends people like John into our lives to help us get back on track (in biblical language, *repent*).

It is easy to ignore the problems in our lives, creating a false reality for ourselves. It is usually painful to admit we are in trouble or that we have failed. But, in the end, we need to face the truth. Jesus tells us that it will set us free. In fact, if we really want to encounter Jesus, we are required to abandon all the fake parts of our lives and stand before him spiritually naked.

What John loved about the desert was that nothing distracted him from God's message. The silence, the darkness, the aloneness, allows souls to be honest with self and God.

In this Advent time remember those whom God has sent to you to help you to face the truth. Remember their message and find some desert time this week to think about it once again.

WEEKDAY
READINGS

Monday	Is 35:1-10/Lk 5:17-26	Thursday	Gn 3:9-15, 20/Eph 1:3-6, 11-12/Lk 1:26-38 <i>Immaculate Conception</i>
Tuesday	Is 40:1-11/Mt 18:12-14	Friday	Is 48:17-19/Mt 11:16-19
Wednesday	Is 40:25-31/Mt 11:28-30 <i>Ambrose</i>	Saturday	Sir 48:1-4, 9-11/Mt 17:9a, 10-13