

### “Pregnant with God”

Welcome to Advent. I often wish you a Happy New Year at this time of year because today is the beginning of the Church year. We begin our year without parties, but with expectations like we do at the beginning of the secular year. Let me ask you what are those expectations that we as Christians have at this time of year? Yes, there are many expectations we have as we begin the Church year. It is easily compared to the expectations of mother and father as they await the birth of a child, especially a first child. What are those expectations? There is so much that is unknown.

Advent is defined in a number of ways. These definitions reflect the expectations we have just considered. The Oxford dictionary defines the word as “the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.” As examples, they give the advent of television. As synonyms, they give arrival, appearance, emergence, and surfacing.

Each year we enter Advent anew. This is not a repeat of last year’s Advent or an Advent from childhood or any other Advent. Consider this the first and last Advent of your life. Not because you have never experienced it or you will not live to see another. Each Advent, like each child, is unique. We would not treat our first and second child the same, because we know they are different. They are not clones or imitations or copies of one another. Each child is different, and each Advent season is different. It is incumbent upon us to open our eyes, ears, hearts, and minds to this new season of Advent.

Both Jesus and Paul warn us that this is the time to wake from our sleep. Sleep is the metaphor for the state of mind that walks numbly through our day-to-day activities, not noticing signs of God. However, it is not about living with fear and trembling as though a great disaster is approaching. Rather, it is about anticipating something real and precious that God is preparing for the world.

Because Advent is the time of anticipation, this verse of scripture comes to challenge us. It asks us to wonder about our expectations. A few years back, I was talking with some children about the Advent wreath and why we have it. Some said it marked the days to Christmas, but one young girl said, “We light the candles to mark the days until Jesus is born.” That is it! Whether or not she realized it, she had hit on something important. We are marking the days until Jesus **is** born. We are not waiting for something that has already happened. We are waiting for something that is about to happen. We are expecting the birth of Christ this year.

Our yearnings and our hopes are encompassed in the birth of this little baby. We desire that this year’s birth of Jesus will be the one that marks the age of peace on earth and goodwill for all.

We are a people whose hearts have been broken again and again by this world. We have put our trust in ideas, philosophies, governments, and movements, and they have all turned out to have clay feet. We know there is something genuine because we have experienced it—in a sunset, in the touch of our beloved's hand, in the smile of a stranger, in the thrill of a song, or in an unexplained, but very real, joy. We know there is something, and we know because it was planted inside of each of us in our mother's womb.

We have the divine spark. That is how we know that we are made for something more profound than the clay-footed idols of this world. Each year, when we approach Christmas Day, we feel the yearning grow. Each year we prepare and hope.

Meister Eckhart, a theologian and mystic who lived in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, wrote these words:

*"We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture?"*

It is a surprising and profound theological statement. We are all meant to be mothers of God. Each of us must give birth to Jesus in our hearts. We must give birth to him in our own life. We are meant to give birth to Jesus every single year. We make a place for God in our hearts in order that God will come.

There are so many things fighting for our hearts—money, ego, lust, pain, resentment, wars, and rumors of wars. The world keeps looking for salvation in glitter, celebrity, the histrionic, and in the fury of wind, thunder, and lightning. We know that is not how God works, yet that is what we look for. We know from the story of Elizabeth that it is in the still small voice that God makes the Divine self-known. We also know that God does not break into the world in a palace or on the throne of Caesar, but quietly in an animal feeding trough in a stable. The parents of this King are poor. They have lived unremarkable but faithful lives. Their home is not in the center of power or wealth, but in a backwater of the greatest empire the Western world had ever known. God breaks in with the wail of a newborn, not the battle cry of the Empire. God comes to us where we are vulnerable—in the wonder of a newborn baby.

As we begin our Advent journey, let us make room in the inn of our hearts for the baby. Let us make our hands into a cradle as we accept his body in our hands at the altar rail. Like an expectant mother preparing to give birth, let us prepare for the miracle that is the birth of Christ in our lives this year.

The world may think we are recollecting something that happened long ago and far away. But we know if we want to experience, really experience, the

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truth of Christmas, we must now open our lives to the one who came to save us from the misery of sin and despair. This little baby, whose birth is four weeks away, is ours for the loving, mothering, and fathering this year and for all our lives. This miracle is worth waiting for because it leads us to a fuller life with one another and with God, the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of everything.