

Advent1B
Rev. Amy Donohue-Adams
November 27, 2011

Blessed be the Advent of God!

This morning's gospel exhorts us to stay awake and to stay alert! And many of you are awake and alert!! I know because I sent out an e-mail message on Friday asking everyone to wear something BLUE. And oh, I am so glad and thankful that many of you got the message and are wearing BLUE today! In that same message I also asked to spread the same BLUE word to those without computer access. And again it looks like we did that as well! And I thank you! You might say I began an early conspiracy to celebrate Advent together. After all, you know we are-Advent people! Waiting and watching! Awake and alert to new opportunities! Hopeful that God will break afresh into our lives!

Advent, the first season of the new Christian year, begins today-- the calendar time including the four Sundays just before Christmas. No longer is Advent the stepchild to the longer more solemn season of Lent. Advent now stands on her own, waiting and watchful, pregnant and hopeful, alert and awake.

We have all long awaited Advent in various shades of purple, but today our church is arrayed in BLUE—a rich, warm, lively and vivid blue—somewhat regal, somewhat ordinary. Blue is a color of anticipation, expectation and watchfulness, often underlined by a sense of uneasiness, surprise and uncertainty. Remember the Advent of God's incarnation always takes place in our lives where it is least expected: within a young Jewish girl, a wild preacher, sleepy shepherds, a confused carpenter, curious visitors from far away, and a retired couple in the temple.

BLUE in its truest form is darkness made visible, the color of devotion, a receptive color, which demands an inner focus of peace. It is the color of an inward journey, perhaps the most exciting, the most elusive and the most dangerous one of all, fraught with passion and inner vision. Ultimately, you see, blue is the color of the one unafraid to give birth to the One so long awaited, Jesus, our Lord.

The season of Advent is a season of the heart, a season of surprise and a season of adventure. The celebration of the church year teaches us to approach God seasonally, and to travel along through God's story in a timely fashion. While there is a beautiful logic and rhythm to this calendar keeping, there is also a risk. The patterns become familiar. We risk domesticating the whole business, depriving both ourselves and God of experiencing something new. Perhaps the color Blue can become for us a new sign of the visitation of grace, peace and hope into our lives, when and where we least expect a visit! A new opportunity for God to break afresh into our lives!

If we take God seriously, we are about to embark on a new and surprising Advent adventure. What will Advent ask of us?

Advent will call forth the finely honed ability to wait and listen, particularly within the silences that often come unannounced. Listening quietly for the word of God within daily events is not easy. Advent will beckon us to listen without panic for God's voice to sound loud enough for us to hear. Advent will encourage us to live in the confidence that God will indeed speak! Advent will remind us that the frightening, lonely silences that sometimes surround us are preludes to God's reassuring voice of comfort and support.

Advent will present the profound themes of human existence, themes of bondage and deliverance, separation and reunion, life and death. We can recognize Advent when a child is able to share with us the story of being lost in a crowded department store, enveloped in sheer terror, and suddenly looks up and sees the outstretched arms of a loving parent. Advent also lives within the hearts of terminally ill patients whose life-giving treatments have failed, yet who still share tears of joy over their deep sense of God's abiding love and care for them. And Advent lives within the very ordinary, a relative's phone call, warm blankets, clean water, favorite meals—things we so regularly overlook.

Advent is a season all her own! Advent is a deep and profound season of the heart. Surely we can applaud the church year's option of BLUE as the color of remembrance for Advent. If a simple change of hue sparks fresh insight and carries a new presence of spirit and celebration, I believe God would be pleased!

Where will Advent take us this year?

When we venture into Advent we stand before places unreachable and unknown even to ourselves. Advent fills our deep crevices and our emptiness with healing waters. To adventure with Advent is risky. Advent searches to know our own inner earth—especially those places that have collapsed and fallen, always daring to touch the vast, the complicated, the unfinished and the changing places within us.

Advent remembers that history is written on our interior walls, the lights and shadows of our life, our family, our friends, every hymn we have ever sung, every dance we have ever led or followed, our dreams, our longings, our heart's desire.

Advent walks forward into our own inner earth and finds that God has been there before us. Advent makes visible the dried up and lifeless places inside us. It treads amidst those fierce winds and the seasons of struggle, which often accompany the bountiful harvests, when life and goodness overflow within us.

Advent encourages us to encounter God where we are weakest, when there is danger that the ground may shift beyond control, where we are scarred and in need of divine healing, where we are broken and vulnerable. This is Mary's Advent, an adventure of great passion and vision, a season of the heart, a stirring experience and a daring undertaking.

So be alert. Stay awake. Take risks. Walk boldly! For a new opportunity for God to break afresh into our lives is very near!

Go to that place called barren.

Stand in the place called empty.

And there you will find God.

Blessed be the Advent of God!