

## Advent: An In-Between Season for an In-Between People

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The liturgical cycle has brought us once again to the season of Advent. The Advent season is unique in the sense that it anticipates something we have already experienced. The Christ-child whose birth we celebrate at Christmas is the same Christ we anticipate at his second coming. One part of the celebration looks to the past while the other anticipates the future. This makes us an “in-between people”.



It is a privilege and a blessing to live in the “in-between” times. We have the grace to be able to look back and look to the future at the same time. I propose, then, that we approach Advent 2024 from an “in-between” perspective.

The incarnation of Jesus was a not merely a historical event, but a cosmic event. It did not merely change history; it changed humanity. It did not merely transform the earth; it transformed the universe. But all this was not accomplished in some ostentatious manifestation of power, in unparalleled grandeur, and unmatched majesty. It was accomplished humbly, tenderly, gently, and peacefully. Nothing captures the paradox of the event than an infant lying in an animal trough in a manger surrounded by farm animals. His endearing and holy parents were helpless as they watched over him, nurtured him, even fled to protect him, while also trying to fathom the paradox of the incarnation events. Did not the angel announce, “He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High?” Is a child in a trough in a stable what greatness looks like? Did the angel not also promise, “The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:32-33). Is this what the promise meant?

As we observe Advent, we know the answers to these questions. We know how the paradox played out. We realize how the promises were fulfilled. The gospels tell us that story. And because we are an “in-between people” who know how God came among us, we approach the future confidently. Despite the image scripture paints of the second coming (we owe that to apocalyptic literature), I believe Christ will come again not to beating us into submission, waging warfare, or paralyzing us with fear, but rather, humbly, tenderly, lovingly, gently, peacefully, with compassion and love. It is the privilege of having the “in-between perspective”.

**Hence, I propose 5 ways to make Advent 2024 meaningful:**

### **Be intentional**

Enter Advent with intentionality and with your eyes wide open. It is a beautiful season. It is a purpose-filled season. It is a meaningful season. It is an “in-between season”. On the very first Sunday of Advent, participate in Sunday Mass. In fact, decide to do this on all four Sundays of Advent. Advent has very tangible and visible symbols in the church. Let the mood of the season—the Advent hymns, the change of liturgical colors from green to purple, the Advent wreath, the more subdued spirit of the celebration, and the scripture readings—speak to you. Let them remind you most of all that we are in an “in-between time”.

Decide also that not a single day in Advent will pass without taking even the littlest time to catch your breath, to reflect on the meaning of the season, and to whisper a prayer.

### **Pray the daily scripture**

There is simply no better way to approach Advent as an ‘in-between people’ than to allow sacred scripture to lead us. Each day’s scripture readings for Mass are very carefully selected to lead an entire people to reflect on both what God has accomplished by Christ’s incarnation and what we can anticipate when he comes again. Each day’s readings connect us to the Messianic vision. Without the scriptures to guide us, Advent is directionless—like a ship without a rudder or a car in motion without a steering wheel. Here is a resource based on the Mass readings of the day that also proposes a daily practical action—<https://www.icparishdayton.org/advent>

### **Choose one simple, achievable, love-action**

The Advent scripture readings can be a guide not only for reflection but also for what I call, “love-action”. Let the scripture readings lead you to one simple action for the day. It could be reaching out to someone in need, becoming sensitive to those around us, making a phone call that needs to be made, mending a relationship, performing a daily act of charity, advocating on behalf of the poor and those on the periphery, making it to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or simply spending some time each day in silence and solitude. As an in-between people, do not let a day in Advent pass by without a simple, achievable love-action.

### **Embrace the poverty and simplicity of Christ’s birth**

The liturgical and spiritual mood of Advent as an ‘in-between people’ is not what we find replicated outside of churches and sacred spaces, for what that secular world calls, “holidays”. The glitter and glamor of commercial Christmas has the power to shift our eyes from the meaning of Advent to the temporal, the transient, the superficial. Instead, embrace the spirit of poverty, simplicity, humility, and joy. This Advent, let us train our minds and hearts to find Christ where he was found that first Christmas—in the ordinary, the simple, the humble, the poor, and the innocent. There Christ awaits us to discover the mystery of the incarnation.

### **Homage at Christmas Mass**

The Eucharist is usually associated with the Paschal Mystery—the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. First and foremost, though, every Eucharist is a little Christmas. At every Eucharist heaven and earth unite. At every Eucharist the word becomes flesh to dwell among us. Every Eucharist presents Christ in the manger, only now, on our altar in bread and wine—the flesh and blood of the Son of God. Every Eucharist is the incarnation story played out yet again right in our midst.

A meaningful Advent should lead us to the Christmas manger (altar) where we offer our homage—like the poor shepherds, like the magi. The Christmas Mass offers us the opportunity to offer him our lives in profound and perfect homage. This is closest we get to heaven while we are ‘in-between’ here on earth and our future destiny in heaven.

May Advent 2024 lead us to Jesus Christ, who came to us at Christmas, and awaits us in eternity.