

From Pastor Marissa Becklin

Hurry Up And Wait: Ways To Observe Advent

As I was saying goodbye to the students that I coach this fall, we were discussing what activities they might participate in come spring. One girl turned to me and said "I might try softball, but I'm worried that there's too much waiting. I'm not very good at that." I had to laugh at her honesty, because she is right—waiting is really hard, and none of us are very good at it. Whether it be waiting for the next phase of our lives, for an appointment to start, for news, waiting can feel excruciating. We live at a busy pace, trying to find ways to fill each moment of our days. When we have free time we don't know what to do with it. When we are met with the task of sitting in the unknown with no plans, it overwhelms us.

We all know that our culture rushes toward Christmas. Many in our midst begin listening to Christmas music at the beginning of November, and decorations have been on shelves for months now. I had our Christmas cards addressed and presents wrapped before Thanksgiving, in anticipation of seeing people from the Midwest. We've already made plans for Christmas Eve preparations at church.

The consumerism of Christmas and all of the ways that we make it about presents and culture *more* than we make it about Jesus' birth are challenges that the church faces. But that's not what I'm writing about this month. Instead, I'm inviting you, asking you, imploring you: this year, let Advent be Advent.

What I mean is, Christmas *will* come. It is on the way. We have so much celebrating to do upon the arrival of our Lord and Savior on earth. God will keep God's promises and show up in our midst, humbling himself to join us as a little baby in a manger.

But right now, Mary is still pregnant. She has not yet given birth. And we are called to be pregnant with hope alongside her. Rather than jumping right to the celebration of Jesus' birth, we are called into a season of holy waiting. This season is about taking stock of our lives, making space for Christ in our homes and in our hearts, and thus noticing what we can let go of to make more room for Jesus. Just like a parent gets ready for the arrival of a baby by "nesting", or by preparing the space and making the home safe and welcoming, we spend this month nesting in order to be ready to welcome the arrival of our Lord.

We also need to be realistic—I don't expect your family to wait to put up a Christmas tree until December 24, or to avoid parties and music and movies until then either. But as you go about the month, remember that it is Advent, and the promise of Christmas is yet to come.

What might this look like in practice? In this month ahead I invite you (and your family) to take time each day, perhaps during a meal, to reflect on your relationship with God. What are you hopeful for? What is good news about the coming of Christmas? How can you make room for Christ in your heart and in your home, in your schedule and in your family life?

As we engage in this season of nesting together, I invite us to use this prayer at the beginning of each day:

God of Love, Your Son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us. He is a sign of your love. Help us walk in that love during the weeks of Advent, as we wait and prepare for his coming. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

In God's peace, Pastor Marissa