

## Reflection          Advent Stillness before Christmas

**Advent** is a season that looks back and looks forward at the same time. We look back to the birth of Jesus in simplicity over 2000 years ago. We also look forward with hope to the unfolding of the kingdom of God as Jesus comes in tenderness and love to meet us face to face.

Advent is a season of **waiting**. What is that waiting like?

Is it calm and tranquil as each day flows in simplicity from one to another – as the season's customs become as comfortable as your favourite sweater – no pretension – just a good warm fit....Others might want you to take it off and put on something more festive – 'not yet', you say – 'I'll wait a while'....

You might take more time with prayer during these weeks – sitting comfortably with the prophets - Isaiah and John the Baptist – open yourself to their challenges they might cause some discomfort as you hear their words.....'let every cliff become a plain' – what does that mean for you? – is it a smoothing out of a relationship that has become rough? - think about it – give it time.....'the eyes of the blind will see'....what fresh insights await you over the next few weeks....'I am not fit to undo his sandal strap' – what humility – is that an insight that came to John in the distraction free zone of the desert? – have you got some desert islands to go to?....where are you not distracted....what does humility mean concretely to you?

Or maybe you attend on Elizabeth and Mary as they wait in expectation....in your quiet accompaniment some of their joy...graciousness...acceptance...trust might rub off...'the child in my womb leapt for joy'....'let what you have said be done to me'... All these possible people in the waiting room of Advent of the Bible.

Who else might be there?....the doctor with the test results...a relative after the job interview...an asylum seeker looking out for news about the future...a homeless person looking for a place for the night...for the moment you hand them over to God...you wait and see what you are asked to do in the situation...you may be called to be a rock for someone or to allow another to take care of you.

Advent is a season of **patience**. It is like the Advent Calendar with its daily thoughts and treats - one at a time – a surprise each day – no need to rush ahead – I can wait until tomorrow. What does that patience feel like? Is it a struggle not to anticipate – to take a peak at what's ahead – to slip into the future without opening up the gift of the present - the now. What is that now like? .....is it comfortable....secure...calm... is it something I want to escape...to avoid...to run from...anywhere but here and now. Patience...stay with it...you are not alone...do not be afraid.

Advent is a season of **attentiveness**. We wait in a spirit of calm expectation, with our eyes wide open in gentle alertness, for the unfolding of the gifts that Jesus has prepared for us. A Christmas song tells children '**you better watch out**'. In the Gospel of Mark, for the first Sunday of Advent, Jesus challenges us to '**stay awake**'. These two phrases have something in common – being alert and being attentive.

What is this attentiveness like? Is it noticing the peace that comes when we create the right environment – no phone or radio or T.V. – some gentle music – a candle – a quiet place or are feeling more chilled out as the season moves forward. Is it about hearing God crying from the wilderness of our mindlessness – speaking words of promise, encouragement and renewal? Is it paying attention to the people in our lives who we might take for granted? This attentive standing back sometimes reveals the other person in a new light – their presence illuminated by the glow of their constancy, the warmth of their support or the unnamed security of their being there. As we count our gifts we are mindful for ways to offer what we have received. 'You received without charge, give without charge'.

Advent is a time for **gentle prayer**. We begin to notice anew the presence of Jesus in so many different ways. We appreciate the many gifts that we have been given as we see Jesus in the people with whom we live and work - especially our families.

Prayer leads us to **quiet thoughtfulness** making us more aware of the needs of others. In the silence of Advent we are inspired to reach out, like Jesus, to those who find it hard to survive, those who are left out by others and those in need of healing words and touch...'the hungry he has filled with good things'...

In the **stillness** of Advent we learn to be active in proclaiming the kingdom of God and in spreading the good news of the Gospel. We are mindful too of the words, attributed to St. Francis Of Assisi, 'Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary also with words.'

May this Advent retreat be a time to notice and to celebrate the joy of love in our families.

May this Advent retreat be a time for paying attention to ways that might make the paths of our relationships more smooth.

May this Advent retreat be a time to become aware of the value of peace and moderation as we look forward with hope.