



Fact of Faith

Advent: A Biblical Journey of Hope

by Marcellino D'Ambrosio

Advent is simply the Latin word for “coming.” If we can manage to meditate on any “coming” in December besides the comings and goings of Christmas shopping, it’s usually Christ’s coming to Mary in a stable.

But the Scripture readings of Advent mainly focus on another coming: the second and final coming of Jesus at the end of time.

From the earliest days of the Church, people have been fascinated by Jesus’ promise to come back. Many have claimed to recognize the signs of his imminent return and have even tried to predict the date.

But our Advent scripture readings tell us not to waste our time with predictions. Advent is not about speculation. Our Advent readings call us to be alert and ready, not weighted down, neutralized and utterly distracted by the cares of this world (Lk 21:34-36).

Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 3 to work to make greater progress in the life of holiness, putting on the character of Christ.

But as we engage in the challenging work of preparation, we are to labor in joyful anticipation. For Advent is a season of hope. Yes, mountains need to be leveled and valleys must be filled in (Is 40). But that is primarily God’s task. And he will do it. For “God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory,” says the prophet Baruch (5:9).

In fact, the third Sunday of Advent is so much about rejoicing that it is called *Gaudete* (Rejoice)

Sunday. “Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again, Rejoice!” commands the apostle Paul (Phil 4:4-7).

Yet the Gospel from this same Sunday features the stark figure of John the Baptist, calling people to repent and reform their lives in preparation for the coming of someone who is much mightier than John . . . We, like John, are also to prepare the way by calling others to Christ. Think about inviting someone to church during Advent. Evangelization can be as simple as that.

The final Sunday of Advent seems to fit in more with our idea of the holiday spirit: Mary visits Elizabeth and the talk is about the two babies to be born. John leaps for joy in his mother’s womb, Elizabeth acclaims Mary, and Mary magnifies the Lord (Lk 1:26-38).

But bear in mind that Mary, newly pregnant, has just made a bumpy 70-mile donkey ride and has two more to go before she gives birth in a stable. And Elizabeth, of advanced age, is about to have her first child (by modern standards, a high-risk pregnancy). Advent joy is not always comfortable.

Of course, there is no birth without labor. So, as we rejoice in hope over the imminent coming of Christ, perhaps we ought to do everything possible to make sure that the labor goes successfully.

For if Christ is born anew in us this Advent, there’ll really be something to rejoice about come Christmas morning.

D’Ambrosio writes for the Catholic News Service from Texas. He is co-founder of Crossroads Productions—www.crossroadsinitiative.com—an apostolate of Catholic renewal and evangelization.

