



## WAIT FOR JESUS AND BRING SOME HEAVEN NOW

Waiting in the grocery checkout line; waiting for the traffic light to change; waiting for our little hounds to sniff out exactly the right blades of grass for their bathroom duties; it's frustrating! At medical appointments, you wait in one room, only to wait in the next one.

Waiting is a big part of everyday life, yet even with all that practice, waiting patiently does not come easily to most of us. After all, we have things to do and places to go, and waiting slows us down.

And that's precisely the point of Advent, observed by many Christians during the four weeks before Christmas. While the culture pushes us to cram this time with extra doing, going, and spending, and all the anxious waiting that comes with it, Advent offers something different.

Yes, Advent is also about waiting; but this waiting is expectant, confident, and fruitful. It entails slowing down to focus on both the first coming of Jesus 2,000 years ago and his second coming at an unknown time (Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 24:36-37). Instead of producing frustration and edginess, this intentional waiting yields joy and peace, as we encounter the changeless love of Jesus even in the here and now.

Taking time in Advent to pause, be still, and ponder God entering time and space to save us rightly pushes the busyness of the season to the fringes, while centering us on the mystery of the incarnation: Jesus, fully God, becoming fully human. As the old, folk hymn proclaims, "What wondrous love is this, that caused the lord of life to lay aside his crown for my soul!"

We know that the thousands of years of waiting for Jesus to come the first time were rewarded beyond measure by his blessed birth in Bethlehem, "in the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4). It changed everything, forever.

Likewise, we know that the wait for his promised return will be rewarded by his magnificent coming again "with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). Again, we await "the fullness of time", when Christ plans "to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10). Well worth the wait, however long it is!

But Advent and the Christian life are not merely about looking heavenward and waiting. As Benedictine theologian Joan Chittister said, "We are not here simply to wait for heaven. We are here to bring it to earth." And Advent brings ample opportunity to do this.

With Christmas in the air, people are exposed to the reality of Jesus, even if they ignore Him otherwise. And despite all the trappings of good cheer, people are still dealing with darkness in the world and troubles in their own lives, so this may be the very time they hear Jesus knocking at the door of their heart, and decide to let Him in (Revelation 3:20).

We can help foster that by showing them the living gospel, through our Christlike attitude and actions. Any little way we can convey God's love will stand out amid the strain and struggles that can come with Christmastime.

We can bring encouragement to any encounter with just a kind word, a smile and eye contact, a cheerful donation to a worthy cause. We can take time to notice and care about someone who is alone or lonely, even in the midst of a crowd.

And we can convey God's love as we wait – at the checkout, at the traffic light, at the doctor's office – emanating the peace and hope that the truth of Jesus' coming and the promise of his coming again instills. Serene waiting conveys God's peace, even wordlessly.

Perhaps someone you know is already waiting – for medical results, for a relationship to be restored, for a glimmer of financial relief. You can bring some heaven to them today, by offering your prayers and presence while they wait, embodying God's word: "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14).  
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With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux