

THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

# Beginnings

## Where *Are* We?



## DAY 1

# Patience

**I**welcome you to a holy journey in these weeks ahead. On this First Sunday of Advent, we hear the call for patience. Our Gospel reading for today from Luke 21 evokes a sense of hope and anticipation as we await the “Son of Man coming in a cloud with great glory” (v. 27). Jesus assures us (v. 35) that the day will come for everyone in which the scriptures will be fulfilled; the whole cosmos will be involved in redemption. We need to “Be alert at all times” (v. 36), which requires great patience.

Advent is a time of re-creating an old sacred journey. The setting aside of these days was an attempt as early as the third century to prepare yet again for the coming of Christ in our hearts. What does it mean that God sent God’s Son into

the world to be born in human flesh? How might we take some time to reflect on this incredible gift and lay again the foundation to receive this truth into the fabric of our lives, the crevices of our souls and spirits, and the life-blood of our bodies? It is in the experience of Advent that we can open ourselves to be yet again surprised by the joy of birth and to see that this birth is about another birthing within us. Let us look at each day of Advent to see ways our daily living intersects with the joyful, hopeful expectation of this birth, and how this birth is already presenting itself in the way we view life, ask questions, and contemplate life's persistent challenges.

Many years ago I experienced heart arrhythmia. It happened unexpectedly on a Sunday morning just as I was awakening from sleep. After an extensive checkup, nothing was found that could have caused that condition to materialize. Over the next few years it occurred on other occasions at the same time of day with the same checkup and results. While it has been ten years since the last episode, one of the gifts of those occurrences is that I welcome each new day with great gratitude. Today is a gift beyond measure. What might I do, be, accomplish, try on, explore, or give thanks for on this day?

In the Christian calendar, this first day of Advent is the beginning of a new year. For some of us our hearts can be pounding with anticipated meetings and deadlines. They also may be pounding with excitement about seeing an old friend or anticipated time with a family member. Or perhaps this day

reminds us of a loss or worry that can sometimes envelop our hearts, breaking them yet again and again. Advent can also be a time when we remember our histories and recall when a yearning for a messiah was on the lips of many and a hoped-for rescue from bondage was sought. Who is the messiah for whom we wish? What might happen if the messiah becomes present? So what seems like a split second, our present-moment thoughts might welcome both past and future hope.

As tempted as we might be to draw conclusions, jump into the future, or make something happen, today we can pause and wait for something to happen in our hearts, our prayers, our spirits, our relationships, and our observations of the world around us and within us. For many of us this is becoming increasingly hard to do. There is so much that can cause us fear, anxiety, and impatience to want to make something happen. Perhaps we might choose to follow a different path if only for a little while today and over the next few weeks. It just might make all the difference in what we observe.

When I worked in New York City, I often stayed in the City because it was easier than tackling the commute (two to two-and-a-half hours each way). But when I did go to Penn Station for my train, I often noticed the crowds increasing and the pace of walking quicken the closer I came to the station. By the time I got to the stairs or escalator, it was a mad rush. I often wondered why I and others were paying the price for someone else being late for the train as they were rushing and pushing to get to the track. Of course, I was on occasion that

person myself. Where did patience go in this picture? The same is true on the road as cars hug our bumpers, drivers honk at us at every turn, and at the end of a run as we are stopped yet again I notice there are only a few cars ahead.

After 9/11 there was a strange silence in the City for several weeks. I heard no horns being blown. Yes, there were many sirens of emergency vehicles, but little or no sounds from other drivers. There seemed to be a moment of respect, giving way, and patience in our collective suffering and shock that honored the fact that we needed to go into an interior space to come to some initial terms with what had happened to us in our external world. After time, the noise and impatience returned, but the memory of that earlier time is always within me. It gives me hope that people can rise to the occasion, on occasion, and offer space for others to grieve, integrate, and reflect on their lives.

The yearning for the coming of a Messiah was palpable in the hundreds of years leading up to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The Jews felt assured that God would not abandon them. They also believed that God was active in history so that historical events took on special significance for them. These hopes were ignited even more with the revolt of Judas Maccabeus in the middle of the second century BCE, and were both challenged and heightened further after the Romans took over the land 100 years later.

So we may sing on this day: O Come, O Come Emmanuel. We are in the present moment, kissed by the past, and being beckoned to the future.

## Reflect

1. What might your experience of patience and impatience have to say about what is brewing inside your life and spirit?
2. How can we keep our impatience at bay just long enough to stand in the whirlwind of these questions and be present to a new birth just waiting to be birthed within us?
3. How can the Christ that we yearn for be born again and again in our hearts?