

ENGAGING

Advent

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



AWAKENING TO LIFE

M

ary's pregnancy has a few highlight moments in Scripture: the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Nativity. We're invited to consider these events at multiple times throughout the liturgical year, but they only

make up a fraction of the nine months Mary spent carrying Jesus in her womb. How did she spend the rest of her time? Probably engaged in the same sort of homemaking as any wife and expectant mother, albeit the first century version. She prepared meals, washed clothes, and tended to the upkeep of the home, all with the awareness of a new life growing within her. She had hope and anticipation – the very spirit of Advent.

We may not all have the experience of a pregnant mother, but the life of Mary during those nine months

is the very life of Advent. Our time of waiting has an end. Our spiritual anticipation has a point of fulfillment. As Jesus was born of Mary, so too can new life be born in us. Every Christmas offers the opportunity to be renewed in the life and love of God.

This transformation brings a communal benefit. Mary's "yes" to the angel Gabriel resounds throughout time and space, bringing grace to each individual life. We are called to bear Christ to the world as Mary did. Invite the lonely person in your parish to dinner. Buy groceries for the harried mom behind you in the store line. Don't just write a check to the soup kitchen – volunteer! When we say "yes" to the plan of God, when we say "yes" to the unexpected, life is always renewed and reborn.

"Every Christmas offers the opportunity to be renewed in the life and love of God."





CANDLESIDE CONVERSATION

- When was a time you had to wait for something? How did it make you feel when it finally arrived?
- Can you think of any places where God might be asking you to be more aware of His life?
- Who is someone God is calling you to “bring life” to this week?

/// MARY, MOTHER PAR EXCELLENCE, helps us to understand the key words of the mystery of the birth of her divine Son: humility, silence, wonder, joy. She exhorts us, first of all, to humility, so that God can find space in our heart, not darkened by pride and arrogance. She points out to us the value of silence, which knows how to listen to the song of the Angels and the crying of the Child, not stifling them by noise and confusion. Together with her, we stop before the Nativity scene with intimate wonder, savoring the simple and pure *joy* that this Child gives to humanity...we make the sentiments of the Virgin our own, remaining in anxious expectation for the Birth of Christ. **///**

—Bl. John Paul II, Homily on December 21st, 2003

ADVENT Q & A

Q: Why is Mass celebrated at midnight on Christmas Eve?

A: The idea of keeping vigil – staying late into the night in spiritual preparation – has been part of Catholicism for millennia. Christmas Masses include three distinct liturgies with different sets of readings: Mass at midnight, Mass at dawn, and Mass during the day. Some parishes move their “midnight” Mass earlier to accommodate families, harsh weather, or difficult travel conditions, but some have canceled it in favor of the vigil Mass, held earlier on the evening of December 24th. Mass at midnight has special significance, however. The shepherds kept watch over their flocks throughout the night – it was in the middle of the night that the angels appeared to announce Christ’s birth. When we disrupt our schedule for the sacred, we’re participating in a tangible re-presentation of that Christmas night. We too have been keeping watch throughout the Advent season. This month-long “vigil” ends with the night of the world illuminated by the coming of Christ.



KEEP WATCH FOR JESUS

This week awaken renewed anticipation for Jesus by bringing life to others!

15 MINUTES:

Buy hot chocolate for a Salvation Army bell ringer. Ask them why they choose to volunteer at Christmas time.

1 HOUR:

Shop for an item to donate to a local non-profit collecting gifts for families in need.

AN AFTERNOON:

Gather some other families to sing Christmas carols at a local nursing home. Bake cookies ahead of time to pass out to the residents.

AN *Advent Prayer*

Come, Lord Jesus, as we keep watch in wonder.

Come, Lord Jesus, as we prepare your way with hope.

Come, Lord Jesus, as we rejoice in your light.

Come, Lord Jesus, as you awaken our hearts to your life.

Amen.

