

## Introduction to the Advent Season and December 1 Reflection

By Maria Fest, CDP



*This season breathes the winter–spring atmosphere of Advent and Christmas. Just as during winter, the sap settles into the roots of trees, Advent reflections rest with our ancestors and origins. Yet Christmas hopes of a new spring are astir and draw our thoughts upward through the branches where new life germinates. At times, then, Advent and Christmas leave us composed within the warm earth and at other times within the brisk caress of the spring wind, reaching us from distant places. (Caroll StuhlmueLLer, CP, *Biblical Reflections for Advent and Christmas Season*, 1980)*

The Sisters and Associates of Divine Providence invite you to share in our Advent/Christmas reflections. It is most appropriate that together, we look at our roots and embrace our ancestral hopes. We are doing that as a Community as we get in touch with our deep story—the story of our roots, including our founder and foundress, Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler and Marie de la Roche, as well as our foremothers here in the United States. As we enter into that story, we are pondering how that has influenced who we are today. We do that also as members of our families. Where are our roots? Who were our ancestors? What does our ancestral story have to do with who we are today? And we do that as people of faith. While Advent invites us to live with our biblical ancestral hopes, it also alerts us that the genealogy, also part of the Advent/Christmas readings, is pregnant with new life. We have hope that a new generation is about to appear. New life will be experienced within our very selves. Yes, the season invites us to live with the winter–spring tension of the Advent–Christmas season, where we are called frequently to the sources of our faith life as well as to nurture a spirit awakening to new possibilities of love and kinship. Yet even while our minds and hearts are nudged into action, they are also called into a contemplative silence.

Besides being a season, we recognize Advent as a period or a time of waiting, a time of preparation. For whom are we waiting? For what are we preparing? What are we commemorating as we light candles each week on our Advent wreaths? If we are waiting for Jesus, there can be little feeling of urgency or excitement about his coming, an event that occurred more than 2,000 years ago. Is it the second coming of Christ that we await? Regardless, what happens when the season is over? Perhaps we need to make a radical shift in our perception of what Advent time is. Advent is a time of waiting and anticipation, but it is not we who wait—it is God who waits for us. Advent is not our invention to structure our waiting for the Christmas holiday, but God's invention to keep us open to fullness of life, both now and in the future. When the season is about coming face-to-face with a waiting God, that makes a difference! God may be waiting for us to see things as God does—to embrace the vision told to us by our ancestors in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. We acknowledge that we live in a global village that is becoming smaller. We are aware of civil unrest and wars, hurricanes, typhoons, tornados, forest fires, earthquakes that have affected so many people worldwide, gun violence, gang activity, human trafficking, and the need for immigration reform. The list goes

on. Do these issues condition the way we hear the promise and discern the contours of God's kinship?

December 1, 2013, First Sunday of Advent

God waits for us to accept and appropriate the person of Jesus, whose birth marked the "inbreaking" of God's kingdom, whose source of life is embedded in the future. On this first Sunday of Advent, we are filled with the promise of men and women who "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, where one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war." (Is. 2:1-5) Is God waiting for us to promote peaceful ways of living, in which nations spend more time and money on developing agricultural methods that can feed the hungry of the world than on armaments that lead to destruction? The problem is, when Advent is our waiting, the messianic promise mediated through Isaiah and other sacred writers often is perceived as a wonderful vision, but impractical to carry through. But what if Advent is God's waiting? What if God waits for us to see things as God does? If Advent becomes the vision of what is possible for those who decide in favor of the Kingdom of God, who take God at God's word that the future fulfillment of God's promise has already begun to unfold in our midst through him whose birth we commemorate, then there is no excuse for disclaiming the reality of Isaiah's vision. (Daniel McLellan, OFM, *Advent: Not Ours but God's, Review for Religious*, Nov.-Dec. 1982)

In Romans 13:11-14, Paul demands:

"... that we live honorably as in the daylight, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ ..."

God is waiting for us to cultivate discipline that allows us to develop strong wholesomeness that leads to compassionate care of each other.

In Matthew's Gospel (24:37-44), we are asked to prepare for surprises and sudden changes. Yet how do we prepare for the unknown? Perhaps by patience with others in their journey, by tolerance of those who are different than we are, or whose words and actions clash with our plans and desires, by listening to others who are lonely, or by encouraging or affirming others in their brave endeavors.

If Advent is God's waiting, for *what* is God waiting? God has given us the words of Scriptures with their promises, vision, challenges, and words of encouragement. God waits for us to recall each year that Jesus is our future and that we are invested with power to further the kinship of God. God waits for us to be reconciled with each other, to offer the needed word of forgiveness, to speak the word of encouragement to those who need it, or to make God's love and care more visible.

Advent tells us that we are not waiting for God, but that God waits for us. It tells us that God has given us all that we need to stay the course. How do our faith ancestors encourage us during this special time of the year?