

John H. Bonner, III  
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Advent 1

## **“Anticipation”**

Most of us here remember the song writer Carly Simon. She wrote a big hit entitled “Anticipation.” It begins: “We can never know about the days to come, but we think about them in many ways.” The first Sunday of Advent is captured in those words.

The early church was held captive to a great anticipation. Paul wrote to those in Thessalonica, the earliest work of the New Testament, about the final reign of Christ that would occur in their lifetime. The Christian experience is present joy for which Paul would have all believers offer thanksgiving. It is this joy which serves to increase their love for one another. Paul believed that his prayer would be used by God for the people of Thessalonica. Any words from Paul to the early churches was “a blessing on the people.” They all had great ‘anticipation’ of what was going to happen “in Christ.”

The world was a ‘dark’ place before Jesus coming. The lessons for today are a reminder of the judgment that lay in store. But each lesson also holds a message of ‘hope’ for believers. In Zechariah “*Then the Lord my God will come...*” and in Thessalonians as Paul is kept away by persecution he says “*Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct*

*our way...*” and finally in Luke , from the confusion of ‘distress’ come these words, *“Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory...”* Always God gives us provision for “the days to come.” Advent is about those days. Joy is to mark our understanding of God’s anticipated coming.

Edmund Browning, former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church tells this Advent story:

“A friend wrote a letter about her long expected second child. ...

My husband and I have waited 11 long years for our second child. These have been anxious years, and along with our prayers we must have consulted every medical expert in the country. It has been Bernie [their 11 year old son] who has never given up hope, has never ceased praying, and he is the happiest about my pregnancy. Well, our second child is due in January.

I have had a very difficult pregnancy, in bed for almost five months, and, if all goes well, the baby will be safe for delivery in December, although I hope we can go full term. Please pray for us.

Obviously, we have been concerned about Bernie. He is so excited about having a brother or sister. At first we were worried about the great age difference. Then we were worried about sibling rivalry, jealousy, and

rejection. We have done all we could to include him in 'welcoming' the baby. He has helped wallpaper, paint, and furnish the nursery. Recently he has been trying to hear the baby's heartbeat. I know he is a special child, but I am sure that down deep he feels the same anxiety about the safe birth of the baby that my husband and I do. However, this is not the reason for my letter to you.

Last Sunday afternoon, after Bernie had come home from Sunday School, he spent a long time up in the attic. He came down carrying a box and went into the nursery. He did not ask for help so I waited. He soon called me into the nursery to see what he had done.

I am touched as I tell you that he had set up our nativity set on the dressing table. There it sat with all the figures except, of course, the baby Jesus. Along with Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the animals, Bernie had added his 3" x 5" school photo to those awaiting the birth of the Christ child. He told me that his Sunday school teacher had told the class about how long the children of Israel waited for the Messiah and that Advent was the time before Christmas when we wait for Jesus' birth. He said he thought that this is just like our waiting for our baby. Then he remembered the crèche and how we set it up before Christmas, without the baby, to be prepared to

welcome the baby Jesus. 'I know it is a bit early,' he said, 'but I do not think Jesus would mind do you?'

I could not help crying as I looked at the manger and the crib and the light of comprehension on my son's face. He has helped us to a new understanding of Advent, and he has given his parents a new perspective on a long-awaited and difficult pregnancy. Somehow I know that God is with us and everything is going to be O.K. That is what I really wanted you to know."

This time of year life takes on a wonderful and wondrous expectation. Friday night we went to a dance and amidst all of the joyful merriment and dancing and in the midst of the seasonal decorations it was exciting to think ahead to Christmas. When that first candle is lit on the Advent Wreath each year it is Jesus that comes to mind with all the joy and expectation and clearing of the 'darkness' from the world that His life engenders. We now begin the preparation for His coming.

There is a bit of Advent in each of our lives isn't there? It is a time of waiting and of expectation. For Bernie and his parents it was 11 years and then a troubled nine months; for the children of Israel it was many centuries; for a person living with illness it might be 18 months. Advent is a period of time, but at a deeper level it is a state of faith.

“Advent tells us Christ is near...” says the old hymn and indeed He is, always. As our scripture today shakes us to our very foundation it is as always for the believer encouragement that overrides this word. We are shaken at times like all others but when ‘darkness’ threatens Jesus words about His coming bring us back to our deeper understanding of a God ordered-world in which we live, and an assurance that in the very worst of times the Son of Man is near at hand, coming “*with power and great glory*”. The message of scripture needs to be proclaimed at all times because it is always one of hope: “*Your redemption is drawing near.*” God’s word will never pass away. Prayer always trumps worry. God is “with us” to meet life’s challenges, whatever they may be.

As you “think about the days to come” know that Advent is not about passive, anxious waiting. It is rather joyful and active preparation. Whether you are preparing nurseries like Bernie in our story, or packing bags for a big family get together or reflecting on life or making needed reforms or being faithful in all things or just being patient. Advent is the awareness that God is both at the end of our journey and a companion through it. “God is with us,” writes the expectant Mom. “Emmanuel,” said the angel, “God is with us.” Amen.