

Season of anticipation

November 28, 2009

We buy our ketchup in squeeze bottles because we don't like to wait when we try to pour it. We get annoyed when the microwave oven takes too long to heat our leftovers. We think the ideal Christmas present would be a switch for the car, so we could turn all traffic lights green.

We're lousy at waiting. So, how are we supposed to enjoy Advent, as we await the birth of the Christ Child?

To compound the situation, we already know "the rest of the story," because we've read the Gospels and celebrated Christmas year after year after year. (If I were a betting guy, I'd bet most pastors would tell you the most difficult sermons to prepare are the ones they deliver the Sunday before Christmas and on Easter, because their listeners already know the stories. Finding fresh, unique insights is almost impossible.)

Oh, and another challenge we all recognize: Commercialism just about bleaches the color clean out of Christmas.

It's time

Still, here we are: Just past the first Sunday of [Advent](#), turning our eyes—and our hearts—toward Christmas. How do we go about the counter-cultural business of waiting? How do we anticipate Jesus' birth, yet again.

Like most activities of the heart and spirit, waiting through Advent requires discipline. Amid the bustle of shopping, decorating, preparing cards, planning family get-togethers and travel, not to mention all the year-end business activities, Advent beckons us to practice the discipline of slowing down.

We can get to the heart of Christmas if we take at least a few minutes a day to prepare. It's all about trying to think God's thoughts—and maybe Mary's and Joseph's thoughts, and even the shepherds' and the innkeeper's thoughts. It's about putting ourselves into this Divine Story of love and grace and surprise.

Gather 'round the wreath

For several decades, our family has been blessed by gathering around an Advent wreath evening by evening. We light the appropriate candles, read meditations on the themes of each week—hope, love, joy and peace—and sing carols. This simple daily devotional leading up to Christmas is one of our family's most-loved traditions.

I'll admit stopping each evening to celebrate Advent was easier when our daughters were home, but our old Advent wreath still beckons Joanna and me. Now, we particularly enjoy reading from Advent guides prepared by the church where we were members when Lindsay and Molly were young girls. In addition to heightening anticipation, the daily readings also bring back lovely memories of special seasons in our family history.

It's your time

If you don't already celebrate Advent, our family would recommend it—especially if you have children in your home. If I remember correctly, [here's](#) where we bought our wreath, or maybe it was [here](#), because this is an exact copy of the one we have used. Or, you can [make your own](#).

If your church doesn't prepare an Advent guide, you can type "advent meditations" in an Internet search engine and find many options. Also, you can use "[Following the Star](#)," an excellent daily online guide, prepared by our friends at [Passport](#), a wonderful Christian camping program.

May your Advent be filled with anticipation and wonder.