

Advent 2023

**With Anticipation
and Joy**





Send Us Out with Anticipation and Joy

At this time of Advent,
fire our imaginations
with the sweep of your salvation.

Catch us up
in the cause of your kingdom,
already breaking into this world
in our ransomed lives
yet waiting for its final fulfilment when Christ shall come again.

And let your Spirit,
wild as the wind,
gentle as the dove,
move within us and among us,
to enliven our worship and strengthen our faith
and send us out with anticipation and joy.

– John Harvey



Introduction

Advent is a time for us to understand that God is always doing something new for us. Unlike the commencement of the new year, the Universal Church begins its new liturgical year on the first Sunday of Advent. With this newness comes the revelation of seeing the world with fresh eyes so we can view the future and God's divine plan for us more clearly.

Advent is all about watching and waiting. The word 'advent' comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means 'coming' or 'arrival'.

We are called during this holy time to wait with anticipation knowing the joys of what is to come with the arrival of Christ. This is the time we come together to celebrate this joy with our loved ones.

During Advent we practise the discipline of opening our hearts to the presence of Christ in our midst; we wait for a glimpse of the truth that he is with us; we long to experience the joy of his presence and the wonder of the love of our God, who became flesh and dwelt amongst us and whose Spirit is with us, encouraging us to join in the living of God's Kingdom now.

Our task during the Advent season is to imitate Mary by pondering the Word of God and allowing it to resonate within our hearts and pour into our lives.

Over four weeks this resource provides the opportunity for us to encounter the mystery of Christ present in the Advent Gospels and artwork. We are invited to gather, encounter, recall, reflect, share, connect and consider how we will live differently as a result of what we have experienced.

By being together with our stories, our questions, our open hearts and minds, we can form a community that lifts, honours, and learns from each other as we are sent out with anticipation and joy this Advent season.

Rose McAllister

Manager - Formation and Education
Pastoral Ministries
Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle
September 2023.

Mystagogical Reflection-Dwelling with God in the Sunday Gospel

The person guiding the group invites people into the process based on the following invitation.

Listen to God say to you ... *Be still and know that I am God* (Ps 46:10)

Moved by the Holy Spirit in response we pray ...

Open my/our ears to the Word of God ...

Open my/our heart(s) to the love of God ...

Open my/our mind(s) to the wisdom of God ...

Let us listen for the words of everlasting life ...

Each step finishes in silence before the guide invites the group into the next step ...

1. Encounter with Christ in the Word proclaimed ... listen ...

2. Recollection: What happened?

An Invitation to recall what happened in the text. The detail is important – characters, scenery, actions. No interpretation, just what happened.

3. Reflection: What word or phrase captures your attention? What did you experience/feel? What is God revealing to you? How is this relevant to your life?

An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter and to share what you notice.

4. Faith sharing: How is the meaning found in your encounter with Christ in the scripture connecting with the season of Advent?

An invitation to connect your experience and the meaning you have found in it, with what Christ is revealing in the living tradition of our Catholic faith.

5. Connection: Why does what Christ is revealing matter to us now? What's happening in our world and neighbourhood right now?

An invitation to explore the essential connection between liturgy, faith and life.

6. Conversion: How is your encounter with Christ inviting you to change – to become more and more Christ like?

What is dying? What is being raised up?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God. Conclude your gathering with the blessing.



Mystagogical Reflection-Dwelling with God in an Artwork

Let's be still and know God more deeply as we encounter him present with us in art.

- 1. Reflection:** Encounter with Christ in the beauty of art...
- 2. Recollection:** What do you see?
An invitation to focus on the work and notice the detail. What story is the work telling? What elements have been used to create the work, colour, line, shapes, tones, textures? What symbols or gestures might there be within the elements? What is happening?
- 3. Reflection:** What captured your attention? What moved your heart? What is God revealing to you? How does this relate to your life?
An invitation to be attentive to Christ present in the encounter and to share what you notice.
- 4. Faith sharing:** How is this work leading us into the Mystery and teaching us about God, Christ, Church, liturgy, and Christian life?
An invitation to connect your experience and the meaning you have found in the artwork, with what Christ is revealing in the living tradition of our Catholic faith.
- 5. Connection:** Why does what Christ is revealing in the work matter to us now? What's happening in our world and neighbourhood right now?
An invitation to consider how the work can encourage us in our faith.
- 6. Conversion:** How is your encounter with Christ in the work inviting you to change, to live the mystery?
What is dying? What is being raised up?

Contemplate – rest in the presence of God. Conclude your gathering with the blessing.



”

Contemplation is not a technique to be mastered
but a journey inside ourselves
to become one with what already is.”

– *Daniel O’Leary*



**Advent Gospels,
Artworks & Reflections**

First Sunday of Advent (3 December)

Gospel (Mark 13:33-37)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'

Blessing

We are looking for God in our world.
May we see what God wants us to see.

We are looking for God in our lives.
May we be who God wants us to be.

And may God our Shepherd, Protector, Awakener, and
Holy Spirit, bless us through these Advent days. AMEN



Stay awake. Rose McAllister, 2023 Digital appropriation using images from Unsplash- Marina Vitale and Thomas Kinto.



First Sunday of Advent (3 December)

Reflection by Mary Coloe PBVM

The vestments change, the Gospel changes as the Church moves into a new cycle recalling and celebrating God's coming to our world in Jesus. This year we will hear the earliest written Gospel, that of Mark, written around the year 70 CE. These were years of conflict for the early Christians. The Emperor Nero had begun to persecute Christians in the year 64 and they were considered to be practising a new and superstitious cult. In Palestine things were no better for there had been a Jewish uprising against Rome in 66 that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. Mark's community was under threat and beside all these external factors, Jesus had not returned to them as they were expecting. For forty years they had kept faith but as time passed the waiting became harder.

The Gospel speaks into this situation. Be alert. Stay awake. The Master will return. Mark uses popular images associated with the end of time according to first century Jewish imagination. There was an expectation that the Messiah would return before the end; that the Messiah would lead a war against the Kingdom of evil; this moral struggle would be felt by the whole cosmos with earthquakes and famine. Mark also points to the reality that Christians were experiencing; no longer welcome within Judaism because they were saying the Messiah had come in Jesus; being brought to trial before Roman courts for not worshipping Caesar. This was the life and death struggle for Mark's community.

Living now, so many centuries distant from the Gospel events, Mark's words take on a special urgency. Complacency and routine can replace alertness and watchfulness. After such a long time perhaps we run the risk of failing to recognise the Master. Last week's Gospel revealed this difficulty. 'When did we see you hungry and thirsty, sick or naked?' We might say in response, 'Of course we would have welcomed you – but we didn't know it was you.' This is the alertness that we are called to; to recognise God's coming in the most unlikely ways. As the carols ring out around the shopping centres, watch out, be alert. You never know the time when God will come to you.

As we draw near to Christmas, and are beginning to think about the gifts we want to give, and perhaps the ones we want to receive, it might be a good time to consider the deeper gifts we have, the gifts within our lives and how we are allowing these to flourish and to put them to use for others, our family, our communities, our co-workers. I had a poster once that said something like: who we are is God's gift to us; what we make of ourselves is our gift to God.



Second Sunday of Advent (10 December)

Gospel (Mark 1:1-8)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;
he will prepare your way.

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight,

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.' A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

Blessing

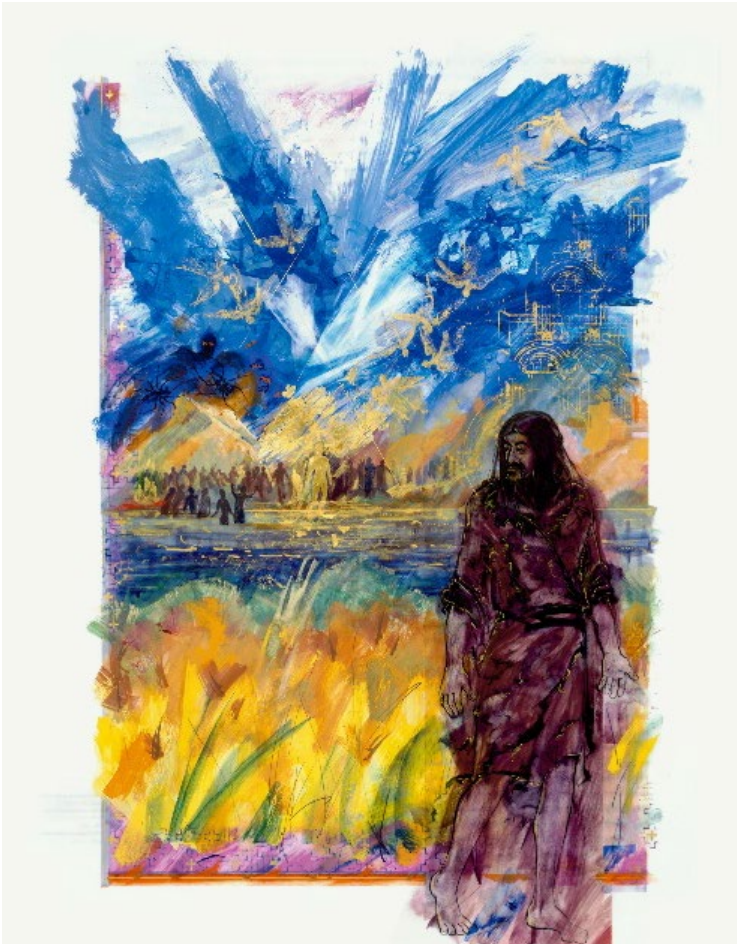
We travel in time;
may God walk with us into eternity.

We travel in hope;
may God sing with us through the darkness.

We travel in wonder;
may God dance with us in holy joy.

So may the blessing of the God of glory,
Traveller, Storyteller, Dancer,
be in us today and every day. AMEN

Second Sunday of Advent (10 December)



Baptism of Jesus, Donald Jackson, ©2002 The Saint John's Bible, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Reflection by Mary Coloe PBVM

Here we have the first written proclamation of the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. Mark wastes no time in his announcement with a long introduction but instead immediately introduces John. Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls scholars now know that at this time there were some in Israel who had a strong sense that God's Kingdom was about to break into history. The community of Qumran by the Dead Sea lived with this expectation and they also practised rituals of cleansing. While there is no evidence that John was part of this group, his message and manner are similar. God's reign is coming. Prepare for it by seeking forgiveness.

Baptism, immersion in water, was a common Jewish practice as a way of purifying oneself before participating in major religious festivals. John applies this ritual to a desire for repentance as preparation for the coming Kingdom. John was remembered as a great and holy man of God. He too attracted disciples and even Jesus came to him seeking his baptism. These historical facts must have puzzled the early Christians, particularly if some of John's disciples were now part of the Jesus group. How were they to speak about John, recognising his greatness while acknowledging that Jesus was even greater? In trying to understand John's role in Jesus' story, Mark looks back to the Jewish Scriptures and uses the prophets Malachi and Isaiah to clarify that John's role is one of preparation for another greater figure who is on the way.

Third Sunday of Advent (17 December)

Gospel (John 1:6-8. 19-28)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

A man came, sent by God.
His name was John.
He came as a witness,
as a witness to speak for the light,
so that everyone might believe through him.
He was not the light,
only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, 'I am not the Christ.' 'Well then,' they asked, 'are you Elijah?' 'I am not,' he said. 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So John said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied:

a voice that cries in the wilderness:
Make a straight way for the Lord.'

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap.' This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.



Outback Gathering, Mel Briggs, 2022, 122x182 cm Acrylic on Canvas. Used with Permission



Third Sunday of Advent (17 December)

Blessing

May God wrap us in integrity,
Clothe us in salvation,
And adorn us with beauty and joy.

And may the blessing of God, Protector, Perfecter and Spirit of Joy,
surround us all our nights and days. AMEN

Reflection by Mary Coloe PBVM

This Sunday again focuses on John the Baptist and the question continues – who are you? This is the question being asked in the early communities. Who was John? How can we understand his mission and its connection to the mission of Jesus? The questioners put to him the names of key Jewish figures who were expected to come in the final days – the Christ, Elijah and the Prophet. ‘The Christ’ is a Greek translation of the Hebrew title, ‘the Messiah’. This was someone in the line of David who was expected to come at in the end-times to restore the Kingdom of David. Elijah was one of the great prophets who was believed to have been taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot and would return at the end of time. The Prophet refers to a promise made to Moses that God would raise up in the future, a prophet like Moses to lead the people. Some thought John fitted one of these hoped-for figures. But John turns down these roles, and instead speaks of himself as ‘the voice’ and he is described as a witness.

Later in John’s Gospel, John describes himself as ‘the friend of the bridegroom’ (3:28-30). In those days, the friend of the bridegroom was the one who went to the home of the prospective bride and he was the voice and witness of the bridegroom. It was the friend who extolled the virtues of the bridegroom to the bride’s father in the hope that the father would give permission for the marriage. The friend then made all the negotiations about the dowry, the day of the wedding etc. The friend was totally focused on the desire of the bridegroom. This is how John describes his relationship to Jesus – John is the friend, the best man; Jesus is the bridegroom. In this way John reveals one of the earliest images of Jesus in the Gospel of John – Jesus is the long awaited bridegroom of Israel, the manifestation of God’s covenant love and desire. Immediately after John’s witness, the first public action of Jesus is to participate in a wedding and provide abundant wine, which was in fact the role of the bridegroom. As Christmas approaches, we might spend time to consider the coming of God to us through this image of love, desire and anticipation associated with a wedding. Those who have experienced this, as brides, grooms, other participants, may recall that time and consider that this very human experience of love, betrothal marriage, is a glimpse into God’s love and desire that led to the coming of Jesus.

John knows his place in God’s scheme. He humbly attests that there is another, even greater, who is coming. This is John’s greatness, to know and accept the particular role he is given for the Kingdom. For some this can take years of searching and pondering. We don’t know what John was doing before this ministry, and it seems that Jesus only began his mission around the age of thirty. As Christmas draws near, may it be a time of quiet reflection on the particular gifts God has given to me, and what particular way I may further God’s kingdom.

Fourth Sunday of Advent (24 December)

Gospel (Luke 1:26-38)

Proclaimed without the liturgical dialogue that usually introduces and concludes it.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

Blessing

We have heard the words of prophets.
May we recognise God's truth.

We have heard the words of angels.
May we recognise God's joy.

We have heard the words of promise.
May we recognise God's love.

And so may God bless us,
Mystery of creation, Child in the manger,
Holy Spirit of glory, and may we
welcome and walk in the promises of
God. AMEN



Faithful reproduction of 'The Annunciation' by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937).
Public Domain.



Fourth Sunday of Advent (24 December)

Reflection by Mary Coloe PBVM

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

In this beautiful and much painted scene the miracle is announced. God is entering our history by becoming one of us. This is the quite extraordinary claim of Christianity. The great divine mystery behind and beyond our world has become a human being. No other religion dares to make so bold a claim. Even as we listen to this announcement today, it is important to realise that it was only possible to make such a claim in the light of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It was the life of this man, culminating in the Easter events that led a group of Jewish men and women to say 'we have seen God with us'.

As we ponder the Gospel scene, it is worth considering how we can present this as more than a children's story and speak to adults in their faith. Sometimes I hear people in my parish talking, and even writing about 'baby Jesus' and I shudder. While this may speak of a rich piety, it also suggests an image of Jesus located in the past, not only for Jesus but also for the speaker. To live our faith in this century requires a robust adult faith, and I just don't think 'baby Jesus' is the best image for nourishing such adult faith.

One approach is to present the Christmas scenes to adults as a rich, theological tapestry proclaiming who Jesus is, by the power of God, even from his birth. If you look at the first Gospel – Mark 70 CE – it has no infancy narrative. Mark presents Jesus as 'Son of God' from his baptism as an adult. This possibly reflects an early stage in Christian thinking and making sense of who Jesus was. The next two Gospels, Matthew and Luke, written in the 80's, take Jesus' origins back further and they both introduce the narrative of Jesus' adult life with two, very different, infancy narratives that introduce Jesus to the reader, before they meet the adult Jesus. Both Matthew and Luke proclaim Jesus is 'son of God' even before his baptism, in fact from the moment of his conception, he is to be called 'son of the most high' (Luke 1:32). In this we see a gradual development of the early understanding of Jesus' identity. Finally, the Gospel of John, written towards the end of the first century, pushes Jesus' divine origins back – 'in the beginning was the Word'. And in John, we have two clear declarations of Jesus' divine status, 'the Word was with God and the Word was God' (1:1), and Thomas' declaration, 'My Lord and my God' (20: 28).

Returning to Luke's Gospel, the mention of Gabriel is a major clue to Luke's theology since Gabriel is the angel found in the book of Daniel who announces to Daniel the coming of the end-times.

While I was speaking and praying the angel Gabriel came to me at the time of the evening sacrifice...

Seventy weeks of years (490 years) are decreed concerning your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring everlasting righteousness so seal both vision and prophet and to anoint a most holy place.

There shall be seven weeks from the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of the anointed one, a prince. Then sixty two weeks in a troubled time.



And after 62 weeks an anointed one [christos] shall be cut off and shall have nothing; and the people of the prince to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with war and desolation and for half a week he shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator (Daniel 9:20-27).

In trying to make sense of who Jesus is, Luke looks back to the scriptures of Israel. By the time he is writing his Gospel, the city of Jerusalem and its Temple has been destroyed by the Romans (70 CE). By just mentioning Gabriel, the entire prophecy would be recalled. As an example, if I say to my students 'Go ahead,' they know the end of this, 'make my day,' from the Dirty Harry films. Or if I say, 'Frankly my dear,' the older students complete the phrase with, 'I don't give a damm,' from Gone with the Wind. Similarly, in the first century people know their Scriptures and so a brief phrase or even a word would recall the whole context.

So Luke presents the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel. Jesus brings to fulfillment Israel's scriptures. He is not presenting a description of an historical event; he is providing his readers with something even more important – how can we understand the event, what does the birth of Jesus mean? In Luke's theology Jesus comes to us as the fulfillment of Israel's longings, and as the one to usher in the new reign of God. This is the importance of Christmas – that God has entered into our history, and remains with us, to be a liberating power in our lives.

Gabriel's announcement in today's Gospel brings heaven and earth together in the womb of a young girl, Mary.



Acknowledgements

© The scriptural quotations are taken from the Jerusalem Bible, published and copyright 1966, 1967 and 1968 by Darton Longman and Todd Ltd and Doubleday & Co Inc, and used by permission of the publishers.

Prayers from *Candles and Conifers: Resources for All Saints' and Advent*, by Wild Goose Publications, © 2005. Used with permission for worship and group work. All rights reserved.

Gospel Reflection: Mary Coloe PBVM © Creative Ministry Resources Pty Ltd. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Images:Cover: Rose McAllister © 2023 Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. All rights reserved.

Week 1 Artwork - *Stay awake*. Rose McAllister, 2023 Digital appropriation using images from Unsplash- Marina Vitale and Thomas Kinto.

Week 2 Artwork - *Baptism of Jesus*, Donald Jackson, ©2002 The Saint John's Bible, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Week 3 Artwork - *Outback Gathering*, Mel Briggs, 2022, 122x182 cm Acrylic on Canvas. Used with Permission

Week 4 Artwork - Faithful reproduction of '*The Annunciation*' by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937). Public Domain.



Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

841 Hunter Street, Newcastle NSW 2302

PO Box 756 Newcastle NSW 2300

02 4979 1200

mn.catholic.org.au