

Advent Gospel Lessons (Year B)

1st Sunday of Advent (Mark 13:24-37)

Jesus said to his disciples, "In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake-- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

Commentary: Fulfillment may always be a receding horizon. The heavens may not be torn open, but the daylight may slowly emerge. In the midst of waiting for a revelation that is beyond our understanding and exceeds our imagination, we have much to do. We are called to stay awake and choose to be people of a future which we can't fully fathom, a future of holy relationships, healed persons, and transformed ecology and economy. We can be citizens of the emerging realm of God right now. We don't need angelic visitors or natural disasters to know what time it is – for it is always God's time and the advent of life-transforming possibility. Open to possibility, we can sing "O Come, O Come" with the lively spirit of "Joy to the World" for God is here! (Bruce Epperly)

Discussion Questions

1. What are the main Advent themes that emerge from this Gospel reading?
2. What new possibilities for your family, friends, work, community, or our nation are waiting expectantly for?
3. What helps you stay awake to what is most important this time of year?
4. What is the most "counter cultural" part of this Gospel reading's Advent message?

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2nd Sunday of Advent (Mark 1:1-8)

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: `Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,"

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Commentary: John offers good news through repentance. In confessing your sins and turning to healthy behaviors, we experience the joy of companionship with God. Confession is not about punishment or shame, but the recognition of our place in relationship with God and others. Do our words and actions, our thoughts and emotions, bring us closer to God or do they distance us from God's visions for our lives? Are we growing or contracting in our care for others? Are we open to change or closed to new possibility?

Confession is not about penance, but abundant life. In pruning the branches, the vine grows and we bear fruit beyond our expectations. John's call to repentance leads to personal and community transformation. We discover that each of us is called to "prepare the way for God" in our families, friendships, and communities. We are way-makers and way-showers in the spirit of Jesus and John the Baptist. Our preparation opens up pathways of healing, reconciliation, and blessing. (Bruce Epperly)

Discussion Questions

1. What are the main Advent themes that emerge from this Gospel reading?
2. Take a closer look at the questions above. How do you think confession, repentance, and honest truth telling, could deepen your experience of Advent and do a better job preparing for Christmas?
3. How has God helped you prepare the way for healing or transformation in the life of someone you love?
4. What is the most "counter cultural" part of this Gospel reading's Advent message?

Advent Gospel Lessons (Year B)

3rd Sunday of Advent (John 1:6-8, 19-28)

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Commentary: John's role is very similar to ours. On the one hand, we come after Jesus and are the beneficiaries of his being among us, sharers in the life he has brought. On the other hand, it is our role to go before him, clearing the way so that he may come into the lives of other people. This is our apostolic, our evangelizing responsibility. Like John, we are not the Light but we are called, by our baptism, to bear witness to the Light by all we say and do. To be honest, could we say that that is really an accurate description of our daily life? (Anonymous Irish Jesuits, Sacred Space, daily prayer online).

Discussion Questions

1. What are the main Advent themes that emerge from this Gospel reading?
2. In what ways do you identify with John and feel you are like him? In what ways do not identify with John and feel that you are not like him?
3. What are some ways Christians in our culture today are "crying out in the wilderness" or "bearing witness to the light"?
4. What is the most "counter cultural" part of this Gospel reading's Advent message?

Advent Gospel Lessons (Year B)

4th Sunday of Advent (Luke 1:26-38)

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Commentary: In a great leap of faith and trust in the angel's message, Mary gives an unequivocal, an unconditional 'Yes'. "Behold, I am the slave girl of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." She had yet to learn what that 'Yes' would involve but it was made unconditionally and it was never withdrawn. Through a life of trials and tribulations, of which we know surely only a fraction, right up to those terrible moments as she stood beneath the Cross and saw her only Son die in agony and shame as a public criminal, she never once withdrew that 'Yes'. There is clearly a message there for us. We too have been called in our own special way to give birth to Jesus in our lives and in our environment. We too have been called to say 'Yes', an unconditional 'Yes' to following Jesus. Now, as we approach the celebration of Christmas, is the time for us to renew that pledge with Mary's help and example. (Anonymous Irish Jesuits, Sacred Space, daily prayer online).

Discussion Questions

1. What are the main Advent themes that emerge from this Gospel reading?
2. Do you have an example of how you have made a leap of faith like Mary? Are you going through a "trial or tribulation" that is testing your commitment to God or your trust in Him?
3. How does Mary's faith help you understand more deeply the miracle of Christ's birth?
4. What is the most "counter cultural" part of this Gospel reading's Advent message?

