



## First Sunday of Advent

December 2, 2012

Advent, a time of preparation and patience, has been called “the season that teaches us to wait for what is beyond the obvious.” It is a time to hope and to trust.

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of the Annunciation, that turning point in human history, when the Archangel Gabriel announces to Mary, the Virgin, that she is to be a mother. Startled and awed by the angel’s message, the practical girl responds by asking, “How can this be?” “Nothing is impossible with God,” Gabriel replies. He tells Mary of God’s plan: “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 called holy, the Son of God.” Mary replies, “I am the Lord’s handmaid. Let it be as you have said. I accept it.” With acceptance and trust, Mary begins the waiting time in anticipation of the holy child’s birth.

Like Mary, we spend much of our lives anticipating the joyous, fearing the painful and trusting in the power of God to see us through. Think of the people who wait in emergency departments, surgery waiting areas, doctor’s offices and clinics. They sit quietly, or they pace the floor. Some hold their smart phones, checking email, playing games, passing the time. Some observe the strangers around them. Others stare inward, as in a state of suspension. Every person is the center of an important story waiting to be played out.

Imagine in your mind’s eye a birthing unit—the staff tenderly caring for a young woman, hardly past childhood, who has had no prenatal care—they comfort and assure her. They carefully check the baby’s vital signs. She trusts them to be with her in her need, and she knows that her life will be changed forever by this birth.

When have you waited lately? How do you wait? Have you waited in an airport—passing the time by watching other travelers? Have you hoped that someone would call?

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Have you anticipated a letter or an invitation? How do you fill your waiting time? Do you give in to anxiety? Do you take time to pray?

Advent's rituals remind us to slow down and wait. We light a candle each week. We join with others in prayer and song. We yearn for the birth of Mary's child. We wait, we trust and we ask: "Where have I been? Where am I now? Where am I going? How will I spend my life? What truly matters?" Advent invites us to trust, to wait, to listen, to be surprised and to be open to the Good News.

The art offered with this reflection is *The Annunciation* (1436) by Fra Angelico. The music, by Margaret Rizza, is "Inpoured Spirit."

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