



**Can't Wait?**  
**Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:36-44**  
**Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (November 27, 2022)**

"In the days to come." These words set the tone as they invite us into Advent, 28 days of seeking to better perceive where and how God is active in our midst.

Isaiah ushers us into Advent with his vision of the future God has in mind. We do well to remember the situation Isaiah was addressing when he outlined his vision. In the opening chapter of his work, the prophet described Israel's sorry state by comparing Israel unfavorably to an ox and ass who responded to their masters. According to Isaiah, Israel's culpable ignorance about God's presence has left her dumber than the ox and more stubborn than the donkey. As an alternative, Isaiah depicts a new possibility, a transformed future in which God's plan for peace and well-being is the divine design for all peoples.

Matthew's presentation of God's future plan is summarized in the image of the coming of the Son of Man. "Coming" translates the spectacular Greek word, *parousia*, a word that combines the concepts of presence and essence. The *Parousia* brings us into the presence of the essence of Christ. It's easy to understand why many have understood the *Parousia* as a reference to the end of the world and Christ's coming in glory.

Our worship service last week was designed to show us the cyclical shape of our liturgical year. We identified the Church seasons by all their diverse and festive colors. The Feast of Christ the King concludes the Church calendar before we start a new cycle with Advent preparing us for Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and then finally the missionary season of Ordinary Time when in the power of the Spirit of Jesus we do extraordinary ministry. The cyclical aspect of the Church calendar is intended as a spiral where the disciples go deeper and deeper into the mystery and grow closer to one another and to God. We do not progress in linear time and space. The spiritual dimension is one of depth, width, and height.

The Church seems out of sync with the rest of the world. The celebration of the birth of the messiah, just as his resurrection, has been kidnapped by the secular world to favor and maximize what is most at heart to it: its commercial drive. The world does not want us to wait. On the contrary, it wants us to rush and to make quick decisions because we are running out of time. The pressure is so intense that people feel like skipping Christmas altogether if they only could.

Author Gertrud Mueller Nelson offers words about how to approach Advent when the world feels like it has already fully arrived at Christmas. How do we invite our own spirits into the waiting, into getting our hearts ready? Nelson writes, "Small children say it all the time. 'I can't wait!' Indeed, that's exactly the urgency we feel in this season...[But] would people make a beautiful turkey dinner for arriving friends and then, saying 'We just can't wait,' eat it before they came? Would a bride, so anxious to show her friends her wedding dress, wear it to the

office?” What does it feel like to wait? [...] How can we begin our Advent worship naming the journey of getting ready and showing how we wait while the world rushes ahead?<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, another approach might be by asking ourselves: “What are we waiting for?” Although the question might suggest urgency, it is rather intended to clarify our intentions, the reason why we wait. Is Jesus’ second coming dreadful or hopeful to you?

In the gospel, Jesus compares the Son of Man to a thief who is coming at an unexpected time. In an article titled “[That Thieving Christ and Advent](#),” the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber wonders if “maybe we should make Advent lists—kind of like Christmas lists, but instead of things we want Santa to bring us, we write down what we want Christ to take from us.” Reflecting on time can bring us to a place of pain because, looking into the past, we may feel the weight of regret, shame, and trauma. Shall we wait for Jesus, the Good Thief, not in fear, but with longing, hoping he will come and steal everything holding us captive?

Jesus invites us to be ready, watchful, and awake. There is a sense of trepidation, of alarm. Jesus counsels us not to be caught by surprise but rather to trust the certainty of the event, and to anticipate his intrusion. It’s not a matter of “if” but “when he comes.” The lack of knowledge of the blessed event (the “when” part) can be unsettling. We don’t do well with the unknown and therefore the waiting. We want to be certain. We want to be in control.

But wait we must. We can’t be in control of life and of the future.

So, how can we plan a journey to the unexpected? The first chapter of Isaiah offers us an essential hint. Isaiah described Israel as God’s rebellious offspring, as people who had forsaken God. They had mistakenly presumed that mimicking the obsequious cults that pagans practiced would appease the God of Abraham and Moses. But, beyond empty ritualism, their real apostasy, their worst betrayal of the God who loved them, was their refusal to care about all God’s beloved. No incense or sacrifice could make up for not heeding the cry of the orphan and widow.

The Messiah of God first came in the physical body of a Middle Eastern baby born in the chronological time of a concrete geographical location of a specific socio-religious-cultural and political reality. That olive-skinned baby grew into a man who lived faithfully all the precepts of Yahweh practicing a love even of enemies, a love that brought him to give his body on the cross for us. On reflecting on his vindication by God through the resurrection, he is said to be alive and still present in our midst through his Spirit. He has called the Church to be his living Body in the world to still bring healing in a divided world. That Body struggles to be visible. We still struggle to believe he called us for this and we shy away from speaking bold words of hope and taking firm steps toward a new future. We don’t want to offend, get into conflict, risk ridicule, lose friends and family. When will the Second Coming happen? When will the Body of Christ return?

This is a period of waiting. This is a time of learning gratitude as we await his return. It’s a time of taking what God in Jesus has given us, our physical bodies, the air we breathe, the water that refreshes us, the fruits of the earth, the animals that populate the world. It’s a time of learning to co-exist, a time of appreciation for the gift of diversity, a time of learning to trust God’s abundant generosity. It’s a time of surrender as we commit to “I am now rejoicing in my

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<sup>1</sup> Gertrud Mueller Nelson, *To Dance with God: Family Ritual and Community Celebration*, p. 65.

sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." (Colossians 1:24)

Let's wait fruitfully and build our courage. Let's ask the Spirit of Jesus to animate this Body and experience his coming. Amen.