

Catholic

UPDATE

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FIRST WEEK of ADVENT

SUNDAY ★ Alert for God's Love

(LUKE 2:10-11)

The Advent Gospels in all cycles have an ominous tone, admonishing us, "Be alert! Stay awake...." We're challenged to be vigilant lest a thief break in.

Fear seems an incongruent response to the beauty of the Lord's coming. An alternative would be a challenge to awaken not for danger but for joy—for kindness, for God's humor in unexpected turns of events. Consider the call to be: wake up for an invasion of grace. Christmas is about God coming in an amazing moment of love. Be on the lookout for love.

MONDAY Find the Beauty in This Life

Let's reflect on the differences between the Nativity stories in the two Gospels. Luke's version is bright, with singing angels, kneeling shepherds, the donkey, and the ox—the children's pageant scene. In contrast, the account in Matthew's Gospel is the adult Christmas story, fraught with difficulty and danger, vulnerability and flight. Here we find relief about the state of our own lives, which can be filled with painful challenges as well as brightness. Remember, Jesus joined us in this life, a place, however imperfect, where we can be at home.

TUESDAY ★ Embrace the Disruptions

Interruptions in the expected pattern don't block God's grace. On the contrary, through them, God creates the amazing story of salvation. So much in the world and in our private lives doesn't fit the ideal pattern. Advent is a time to reconcile with the dynamics of disruption. Remember, salvation unfolds in discontinuity: A virgin conceives a child. God becomes human. Death becomes life.

The Joy of Advent

GRACE THROUGH WAITING

PATRICIA LIVINGSTON

Advent: A strong wind is blowing. An adventure is in the air. Someone is coming. The curious energy of Advent is that we are looking for something we know is already here. It is both right now and not yet. We sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," yet *Emmanuel* means "God is with us."

The days of Advent are like the intriguing little doors on an Advent calendar. Each one opens to reveal some aspect of Christmas. The reflections that follow are some of the doorways I find in the Emmanuel reality—beauty, kindness, prayer, humor, insight, memory, encounter, music, and Scripture. What doors will you open this season?