

## **Advent: Expectations, Promises and Fulfilment**

by Monica Brown



In utter frustration, thousands of years ago, a cry of desperation reverberated in the human wilderness of ancient times, when the prophet Isaiah pleaded with God, “*O that you would tear the heavens asunder, come down to us..., comfort your people, comfort them*”. (Is 64:1; 40:1)

I wonder if that Advent cry has ever been more urgent than in our times, in these days, for our local and global reality? We sense it, we see it, we feel it: the urgency to find God, not in heaven, but in the nitty-gritty of our human struggle and broken humanity. For the barren-hearted, heaven can wait, for if God abides only in heaven then God is irrelevant and distant. For the wounded and the teary, the broken and the poor, the vulnerable and the displaced, those we know personally, and those beyond our knowing, there is a deep longing for God to be with them *where they are*; in their wilderness, and to be with them *as they are*, whatever their struggle may be.

And what is their expectation of God? To do what only God can do for our raw and fractured humanity; be God for us, *our God*: the one who comforts us and makes a difference to our lives simply by being *with* us.

We expect today what the *anawim*, those bowed down and burdened, the blessed of God’s kingdom, expected of God thousands of years ago: that the desert would not only bloom but that it would flourish! We expect that the oppressed would be liberated, that wounds would be healed and tears wiped away, that the lame would walk, the blind would see and the deaf would hear, that those who lived in deep shadow would rejoice in a new and glorious light, and that peace and justice would reign.

We expect so much of God, precisely because God has promised so much to us. The Advent promise is beyond our imagining, nothing less than what our human reckoning considers impossible; that the maiden will give birth to a child and that child will be called, Emmanuel, *God with us!* (Lk 1:26)

We would be fools indeed to believe that God could and would fulfil such a promise! And yet, this is precisely why some of us live our lives so foolishly, struggling in real and practical ways to hold onto the belief that nothing is impossible to God.

To believe in this Advent promise is to believe that God’s desire to be one with us is greater than our desire for God; a divine longing that was so impassioned as to embrace our humanity with such a depth of love that gave birth to the Incarnational mystery, God enfleshed in our humanity!

*“All of life is sustained and intensified by the two greatest sacraments of the heart—that first morning when the huge heart of the Creator spun the earth lovingly into*

*being; and then, that enduring night when God's astonishing desire for us was revealed in the small heart of a starry-eyed and mystified child whom Christians call Jesus."* (Daniel O'Leary)

Jesus is God's most generous and most total response to our Advent cry and the fulfilment of our Advent expectations. Our Church, in its beautiful liturgical wisdom, provides us with an opportunity in Advent to be in touch with our expectations and longings and to live mindfully in the faith that God will fulfil them in abundance! This time of Advent is rich in its scriptural and liturgical imagery and symbolism. But its meaning is not exclusive to a liturgical setting. Its meaning is embedded in our human story. It is as though to be human is to be in a constant state of restlessness and longing, waiting and hoping for the fulfilment of the Advent promise and its realisation, in tangible ways, in our daily living.

Advent is a time to reflect not only on what we expect of God in our wilderness experiences, but what we expect of ourselves. Do we have the kind of foolish faith that enables us to not only survive the desert, but to actually find life in it because God is with us through it all?

Advent is also a time to reflect on how generous and authentic we are in our efforts to embody in our own being, the comfort and the fulfilment of God's promise. For unlike those who walked this earth with Jesus, we can only experience the fulfilment of God's promise in and through our own humanity. St Teresa expressed this so beautifully when she said,

*"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world".*

During this time of Advent, you may find it helpful to reflect on the following songs inspired by the Advent scriptures. To access these songs simply click on the song titles below. May they find a home in your heart.

[\*\*Comfort My People\*\*](#)

[\*\*Tear The Heavens Asunder\*\*](#)

**Please note:** After clicking the link for a song, please wait a moment as depending on your browser and internet it can take a short while for the music to start playing.

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