

Fourth Sunday of Advent

I John 4:7-12

The long wait is almost over. Jesus' birth is nearly upon us. As we get closer to the end of a wait, our expectations grow, often into something that can't be fulfilled. We think a new job will solve our problems at home, or moving away will fix a broken heart. Christmas especially gets saddled with unrealistic expectations, perhaps of family togetherness or the perfect gift. Are you doing this to Christ's coming? Are you expecting something of Jesus? Or are you simply waiting to meet him and accept him for who he is?

Monday

(Jer 23:5-8; Mt 1:18-24)

Stand up for your convictions. Following Jesus sometimes means ignoring what other people say. No one knew this better than Joseph. Imagine what people said when they learned Mary was pregnant. It might have been easier to go along with his plan to abandon her quietly, but he trusted God and ignored everyone else.

Tuesday

(Is 7:10-14; Lk 1:26-38)

Say yes. In our over-committed, over-scheduled world, the last thing many of us want to do is accept another responsibility. Yet couldn't Mary have made the same case? "I'd love to help, God, but this will disrupt my wedding plans, and I don't really have time right now." Is there anything God is asking you to do that you should accept?

Wednesday

(Lk 1:39-45)

Rejoice. Consider the scene of the Visitation. Savor the vision of two cousins, their lives turned upside down, reunited to share each other's joyous news. Picture their awkwardly changing bodies as they embrace. How can you not rejoice with them?

Thursday

(I Sm 1:24-28; Lk 1:46-56)

Be humble. Our society does not place great value on humility. We fear being overlooked if we don't assert our own worth. In contrast, Mary sees herself as a "lowly servant" and speaks of the mercy in store for the downtrodden. Let the Magnificat be your guide as you find ways to practice humility.

Friday

(Judges 13:2-7, 24-25; Lk 1:5-25)

Forgive your doubts. Isn't it refreshing to hear Zechariah doubt God? An angel arrives with news of a longed-for son, and he answers, in essence, "Prove it." In dark moments we all have doubted whether God's promises are real. The good news for Zechariah, and for us, is that they are real, and God keeps them even if we doubt.

Saturday

(2 Sm 7:1-5, 8-11, 16; Lk 1:67-79)

Find your role. Zechariah, struck dumb when he doubted, finally finds his voice. What joyful words tumble forth when he understands and accepts his family's role in the Redemption! What role does God want you to take in preparing for Jesus' return, and what joy can you find in that role?

Christmas

(Is 62:11-12; Lk 2:15-20)

Hope joyfully. The wait of Advent is over, but the wait for the return of Jesus goes on. An active prayer life, regular participation in the sacraments and service to others will help ease the wait. So will our knowledge that the season of Christmas, with its quiet miracle of God become flesh, will one day give way to a Christmas that will last for all eternity.