

THE MEANING OF ADVENT

Fr. Steven Scherrer
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Advent is a beautiful time of hope for the coming of the Lord to transform our World into the Kingdom of God, to divinize it, making it a new creation, for “if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). “And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things *new*” (Rev 21:5). The Lord makes all things *new* because he fills them with himself, that is, all those who believe in him, are baptized, and imitate him.

Advent is the season of the incarnation, the mystery in which God assumes our nature, our humanity, to clothe himself with it, filling it with himself, with his divinity, with his splendor, and thus divinizing it, making it new and resplendent. Thus is the world transformed into the Kingdom of God, illuminated from within, filled with divine love and “full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Is 11:9). During Advent we prepare ourselves for this, so that the wolf might dwell with the lamb, and the leopard with the goat (Is 11:6), so that God might shine in our hearts “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). God was born in our nature, in our humanity, in our flesh, to illuminate, divinize, and fill it with splendor.

This is why there is so much splendor in our celebration of Advent and Christmas. We see a reflection on earth at this time of his divine splendor. We see this splendor because during Advent we purify ourselves with John the Baptist in the desert, where we empty ourselves of the superficiality of this world, to be able to be filled with divine splendor and heavenly peace. And being thus filled with his divinity, we are illuminated and transformed so as to live in divine love and share it with everyone. Thus do we participate in the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God, a peaceful Kingdom, full of the knowledge and experience of divine love.

We should live in eager expectation for the coming of the Lord. It is an enchanted hope that we are invited to live in. And we do not want to break this enchantment. Rather we want to “abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment” (Phil 1:9), to be “pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of justice” (Phil 1:10-11).

What joy to be now already blameless before God by the merits of Christ, prepared already for the day of Jesus Christ, for that day of joy and glory, that day of splendor and light! We grow in this divine love by loving our neighbor, for “God is love; and he who

abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). Then our hearts will be “established and *blameless* in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thess 3:13).

During Advent we long for this coming of the Lord, so full of splendor, to illuminate us and make us blameless and happy before him in the day of Jesus Christ, in his manifestation to the world. “Know that the Lord is coming and with him all his saints; that day will dawn with a wonderful light, alleluia” (ant. 1 vesp. 1 Sunday of Advent). “See the Lord coming from afar; his splendor fills the earth” (ant. Mag. 1 vesp. 1 Sunday of Advent).

Jesus Christ is God-with-us, Emmanuel. We are with God in Jesus Christ. His incarnation puts his light in our midst, it illumines the earth, and illumines our hearts. We hope for his coming in grace now. We await his birth in our hearts. It will be a time of joy. “On that day sweet wine will flow from the mountains, milk and honey from the hills, alleluia” (ant. lauds, 1 Sunday). What is this sweet wine but the new life which we have in Jesus Christ, dead to the past and risen to a new life in God, with his life and love newly flowing within our spirit.

In order to be able to experience all of this, we have to go to the desert with John the Baptist, and live in simplicity and austerity, eating locusts and wild honey, and clothing ourselves in a camel skin with a leather girdle about our loins, thus preparing the way of the Lord (Mk 1:6). He prepared in the desert for the Lord, living an ascetic life, living in terrestrial aridity, but experiencing divine manifestations because his heart was pure and empty of the vanity and superficiality of this world. Only thus will we be prepared to experience the joy of the Lord in the silence of our heart.

“People of Sion,” says the entrance antiphon of the Second Sunday of Advent, “see, the Lord is coming to save the peoples and make his majestic voice to be heard in the joy of your heart.” In the solitude of the desert, in its simplicity, silence, and austerity, God manifests himself to us and reigns resplendent in our hearts, filling them with knowledge and divine love. Those who experience more of this splendor are those who are the most purified of the pleasures of this world, those who live in more silence, and who love their neighbor more, those who listen more in silence for his majestic voice in the joy of their heart.

Then, “Rise up, O Jerusalem, go up upon the heights and contemplate the joy which is coming to you from God” (communion antiphon, 2nd Sunday). Jesus came to our earth so that we might contemplate his glory. It is for this reason that he comes in splendor, to illumine and divinize us. He wants us enter the silence of the desert with John the Baptist to contemplate his glory. He comes to us; but to perceive, receive, and experience him, we have to prepare his way in the desert. This is what we do during Advent. “Behold,” says the liturgy, “the Lord will come with splendor to visit his people, and bring them peace and eternal life” (entrance antiphon, Fridays). It is true that the Lord comes with splendor, so that we might be transformed “from glory to glory” in the very image of the Son by the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).

The desert is the best place to contemplate this splendor and be transformed, by contemplating it, into that which we are contemplating, namely, the image of the Son. Thus we become the adopted sons of God, illuminated by his glory, by his splendor, by his love. He wants us to remain in his love (Jn 15:9), and because his love is splendid, he wants us to remain in his splendor, rejoicing in his love, basking in his splendid light,

with our tent permanently pitched in the heights, in the range of light, on a luminous peak, with him.

But to be able to do this, we must first live an austere and silent life in the desert, a life of prayer without words, a life purified of the lights, pleasures, and noise of this world. This is why St. John the Baptist lived in a desert wasteland; but he experienced heavenly manifestations.

Thus during Advent we wait in the desert for the coming of the Lord, his coming in grace to inundate us with his love and glory, and his final coming to consummate all things; and there we prepare the way of the Lord. Thus “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Lk 3:5-6; see Is 40:4-5). There will be a vast plane on that day, and all flesh will see together the salvation of God. When Christ comes in his glory, then it will be true that “All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Ps 97:3). But now too, in our days—because since the incarnation “their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Ps 18:4)—“All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Ps 97:3).

We rejoice now, therefore, in his salvation, in his splendid love, in his heavenly peace, and in his beautiful light which illumines and transforms us into new men. We bask in his splendor. He came to give us this participation in his own splendor and divinity, incarnating it in our flesh. Thus, “from his *fullness* we have all received, *grace upon grace*” (Jn 1:16). He warms our face and heart with his splendor which shines upon us like the light of the sun or like the reflection from a bonfire. We are enriched from his fullness because “we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14).

We hope for justice on the earth. For this reason God sent to David a shoot of justice, as Jeremiah prophesied: “In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David: and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer 33:15). We hope in our days for the fulfillment of this prophecy. The Kingdom of God which Jesus inaugurated began this kingdom of justice on the earth. We hope in our days that he who began this good work in us, “will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). In our relations of love and service to our neighbor, this kingdom of justice upon the earth begins and develops.

We should live quietly and with moderation and gentleness, so as not to dissipate this joy. Therefore, St. Paul tells us: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. May your *moderation* be known to all men. The Lord is near” (Phil 4:4-5). If we live this new life of *moderation* and gentleness, his *peace* will abide in our heart, shining resplendently upon everyone else through us, illuminating and blessing them. It is a quiet and *moderate* but splendid joy, a heavenly peace, which are characteristic of Advent. It is the love of Christ in the heart, an interior and illuminated peace. It is the result of Christ abiding and shining in our heart with the illumination of the knowledge of God in love. It is something which we do not want to lose by speaking too much or by abrupt gestures. Therefore, especially during Advent, we greatly value *silence* and *moderation*. “May your *moderation* be known to all men. The Lord is near” (Phil 4:5), says St. Paul. It is a silence and gentleness in which we experience divine love shining in our heart, warming us from within, and we can share it with our neighbor, rejoicing in the Lord.

And all will recognize that this joy comes from God, and that truly “the Lord is near” (Phil 4:5).

Advent is a time of sweetness, when new wine drips from the mountains, and milk and honey flow from the hills; when the clusters on the vine are so ripe that the new wine of their grapes drips from the mountains; and the cows so full of milk that the hills flow with it, and with honey from the bees. It is a time of abundance. This sweetness comes from the coming of the Lord, bringing us heavenly light and peace. Only the Lord in his coming can bring us this sweetness. And therefore all of nature is renewed and cries out in jubilation with us. Therefore “the mountains and the hills will sing the praises of God and all the trees of the forest will clap their hands, for the coming of the Lord of a kingdom that will last forever” (antiphon of lauds, 1st Sunday).

We rejoice during Advent with all of nature. A new world is in process of formation in the midst of this old world, a new creation of new men, because Christ-God has clothed himself with our flesh, filling it with his own splendor. Our contact with this mystery, which we see in the illuminated cave of Bethlehem, transforms and fills us with divine love. If only we can keep a sacred silence, full of God, full of wonder and awe, this heavenly peace will invade us, and we will become resplendent with the same light which incarnated itself for our salvation.

We have to imitate the poverty and love of Emmanuel, believe in him, and be baptized, to be divinized and irreproachable in his eyes at the Parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven. The beginning which God made in his birth in the world gives us hope to see its consummation on that glorious day when the Lord will come in glory on the clouds of heaven.

Therefore “it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone, the day is at hand” (Rom 13:11-12). Let us wake up, then, to begin a new way of living, a new type of life, a life that is vigilant, sober, and modest, a life of moderation and quiet joy, so that when he comes, he will find us “watching in prayer, our hearts filled with wonder and praise” (second preface of Advent). Thus when he comes, our hearts will be established, “blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all his saints” (1 Thess 3:13).

How beautiful is this hope in which we live! How much joy it gives us to try to live this way now, this life of *perfection, perfectly obedient* to God’s will! This is the *love* of God: to *obey his will*. “He who has my commandments and *keeps* them *he* it is who *loves* me” (Jn 14:21). Jesus said to us: “abide in my love” (Jn 15:9). He wants us to remain in this happiness of perfect obedience, which is the life of perfection. And if we sin and confess our sin, he forgives us and restores us again in the splendor of his love. Living this way in perfect obedience to his will, we are happy, full of his love, and we walk in his light. We live in his light, which is his will for us. “I am the light of the world,” he said; “he who *follows* me will not walk in darkness, but will have the *light* of life” (Jn 8:12). The *condition* for walking in the *light* is *following* him, which means: *obeying* him, which also means: *loving* him. If we truly *love* him, we will *obey* him; and we will walk in the *light*.

Let us, then, live now in this kingdom of justice and peace, basking in his heavenly light. Let us do this by living in the love of God and neighbor. Then we will enter into his universal Kingdom, prophesied by the psalmist, saying, “Justice shall flourish in his

days, and peace abound, until the moon be no more. He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!... His name shall endure for ever, and his name continue as long as the sun! All nations shall be blessed in him; they shall call him blessed! Blessed is his glorious name for ever, and may all the earth be filled with his glory” (Ps 71:7-8,17,19).

It is a universal dominion of peace, light, and divine love which Christ came to inaugurate on earth. He is the “Prince of Peace,” whose dominion will have no end, “upon the throne of David and over his kingdom” (Is 9:7). “...and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:33). “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called: Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth even for ever” (Is 9:6-7). *He is our peace* (Micah 5:5), and he will be *great* unto the *ends* of the earth (Micah 5:4). *We live in him*, in his dominion, a dominion of peace over all the earth because he brings God to us and enkindles our hearts with divine love, shining in them. And to the degree that we are purified and prepared by going into the desert with John, preparing there the way of the Lord, to that degree will we be able to live now in this dominion of heavenly peace, and bask in its splendor which fills the earth.

Thus we will live in spirit in the New Jerusalem, the city of gold and light, where there is a “river of the water of life, bright as crystal” (Rev 22:1). This is the dwelling of our spirit made new by the incarnation of God on earth. Our contact with him transforms and divinizes us. It is a touch of gold. All that he touches, if we respond with faith and imitation, is transformed in the glorious image of the divine Son. And thus the city of pure gold (Rev 21:18) and light (Rev 21:11) is the dwelling place of our spirit, even now in this life. The city is like a rock crystal resplendent with the light of the sun at midday. “...its radiance” is “like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal” (Rev 21:11). “...and the street of the city” is “pure gold, transparent as glass” (Rev 21:21). And the city is full of light, but not the light of the sun, because “the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev 21:23).

God is like an interior sun, in whose light we can bask, absorbing its dazzling rays which illuminate and warm our face and our heart from within. It is a heavenly light, not of this world. It is the joy and illumination of our spirit. And the nations shall walk in its light (Rev 21:24). It is the radiant light of this holy city, the New Jerusalem, which we receive at the birth of Christ, for he comes from there to bring us this divine splendor, in order to purify us, show us how we should live as a new creature, and transform, illuminate, and divinize us.

We should, then, live in this enchantment, loving our neighbor with the divine love which fills us, and thus grow ever more in this same splendid love. In sharing it and radiating it to others, we become all the more resplendent ourselves. We live in this enchantment by imitating Christ’s life of poverty, his birth in a cave, a stable, outside, far from his home. But what beauty there was in that stable between the ox and the ass, for “The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master’s *crib*” (Is 1:3), as Isaiah prophesied. And what beauty, what glory, there was in those poor “shepherds out in the field, keeping

watch over their flock by night” (Lk 2:8), when suddenly “an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Lk 2:9) to announce to them the birth of Christ the Lord!

We should imitate the poverty of Christ’s birth in a manger, and of his death on a cross, his complete stripping of himself. He made of his life an offering to God, a donation, a sacrifice of love, a holocaust in love to his Father. And we should do the same, detaching, stripping, and separating ourselves from all else for the love of him. If we can leave all the unnecessary pleasures of this world for the love of him, to have a completely undivided heart, reserved for him alone, in due time we will be purified to live in this city of gold and light, basking even now in its splendor, which is the splendor of divine love; and we will remain there in that range of light with our tents pitched with God in the light.

The problem with all this is sin. When we disobey God, when we sin, we fall outside of all of this, and fall into sadness and darkness, and we suffer from guilt and depression. We feel guilty and stained before God; and his light and splendor are diminished in us. I am not thinking of mortal sins. Once purified, small sins and imperfections torment us, things like, for example, not keeping perfect custody of the eyes for an instant, or speaking during a time or in a place of silence. But if we confess our sins, we will be pardoned, and in due time, we will *feel* pardoned and *full* once again of the *splendor* of divine love shining in our heart, rejoicing our spirit in Christ.

Then we will live once again in this *peaceful Kingdom*. Although in the world there is strife, we will have the peace of paradise in our heart, the peace of the universal Kingdom of God on earth which Christ was born to bring us. Thus we should live in his light and peace, where “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” And where “The cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox” (Is 11:6-7). This is the *peaceful Kingdom of Jesus Christ*, whose incarnation divinized us, if only we are baptized, believe in him, and imitate him in his simplicity and poverty, in his offering of himself in love to his Father, and in his love of neighbor. Then our souls will be this peaceful kingdom where the wolf dwells with the lamb, and the lion with the ox.

We await now in hope this transformation of our world into the Kingdom of God, and we begin with ourselves, leaving all for him, to live only for him in everything, until he transforms us into the image of the Son, divinizing us by the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).