



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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Bishop's Advent Message Advent 2022

My dear Friends,

It wasn't long after the Halloween decorations were taken down that the Christmas Lights were going up. I recall being at a large commercial box store in August when I first heard Christmas music playing in the aisle filled with outdoor lights, reindeers, and Santa Claus. We don't want to wait for Christmas; we want it now!

I remember my parents telling me that Christmas didn't arrive early when they were children but came on December 25th. They would go to bed on Christmas Eve filled with hope that Christmas would come, and when they woke, magically, there was a Christmas Tree in their home with small presents underneath. Although they weren't wealthy in the material sense, they were rich beyond measure with wonder and delight on Christmas morning. The hope for something wondrous and extraordinary, such as Christmas, filled their hearts with longing and anticipation.

Have we lost this feeling of longing and anticipation? In our home, we try our best to keep it going, but with online shopping and deliveries to the door, it's as if Santa arrives with every doorbell ring and a delivery truck. Have we lost our patience with waiting for something special to come? We can track our orders on smartphones and see how soon they will be at their destination.

Of course, I'm referring to the commercial aspect of Christmas. The spiritual Christmas still follows the same liturgical pattern with the arrival of Advent, where we are supposed to prepare our hearts for Christ in the dual expectation of his holy Nativity at Christmas and his Second Coming at the end of the ages. The Church tries its best to return our focus to longing and anticipation for the coming of Christ, but we have always competed with the hurried commercial Christmas.

Is it time to renew the Season of Advent again in our Church? Can we restore the mystery of the coming of God in the Christ Child and revive our faith? Perhaps, instead of the hurried pace of the Christmas Countdown, we can use Advent to slow down and make each day purposeful and meaningful, not just for ourselves but for others.

Might I suggest that instead of moving forward with Advent, we **Reverse Advent**? Let's start with the wonder and majesty of the Incarnation by becoming active participants in the Christmas story in all its fullness instead of bystanders waiting for something to happen. As I recently read, "*(let us) strive to see the birth of Christ from inside the stable instead of from*

inside of the mall." (*Advent Conspiracy*, by Rick McKinley, Chris Seay, and Greg Holder. Zondervan, 2009)

We all are familiar with Advent Calendars, where you can open a little window in a box each day and get a little gift or treat. You received a reward as you waited each day until Christmas. Of course, this depended on patience and waiting, and I'm sure many Advent Calendars were empty in a few days. But I remember the Church Advent Folders in which you had to put 25 cents each day and give them as an offering at Christmas. Perhaps with the decline of actual coins and people attending Church, the practice of Advent Folders has left us. Yet, the practice of giving instead of receiving was their reason.

The Reverse Advent movement has been around for a while. Each day, we give something of ourselves as an offering for the joy of Christmas. It may be a can of beans to the local food bank, or it may be giving a day to volunteer at a community meal gathering. Some have taken an environmental focus and may choose to reuse gift wrap or none at all for presents or stop using single-purpose plastics and Styrofoam. Others decide to help single parents by putting aside something each day that will help during the Holidays. The Anglican Parish of Derby and Blackville in New Brunswick has some great ideas about holding a Reverse Advent on their website: www.crosspurposes.ca/project-reverse-advent-calendar/

Whatever you believe God is calling you to focus on this Advent Season, I hope that it helps you focus on the coming of Christ at Christmas and in the daily ordinary of living life. St. Francis said, "It is in giving that we receive."

An Advent Prayer:

**God of hope
be with us on our Advent journey
to the stable and beyond,
be with us in our meeting
and in our travelling together,
be with us in our worship
and our praying together,
be with us on our Advent journey
to the stable and beyond,
our God of hope. Amen**

(John Birch, faithandworship.com)

Advent Blessings,

† Samuel: Eastern Newfoundland; Labrador

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