

I remember when I was a kid, I just couldn't wait for Christmas. It could've been December 26th—the day after last year's Christmas—or December 18th—just one week from this year's Christmas—and it might as well have been the same day. Either way, if when I woke up it still wasn't Christmas morning, then Christmas felt like forever away. Even Christmas Eve, there I'd be, lying awake in bed—the seconds ticking away like hours. It was like my own personal purgatory—a cruel joke—an eternal carrot—having to wait endlessly for the shiny presents, and the jubilant carols, and the big turkey dinner. No matter how close or how far away it was, there stood this immeasurably great chasm of time separating me from my beloved Christmas!

Maybe you know what I'm talking about—having to wait for Christmas to finally roll around. But my guess is, the wait's been more excruciating than just that. See, every Advent the Church reminds us that Christmas is just around the corner, sure, but it also points out that something much, much bigger is on the horizon. What you and I are waiting for isn't so much Jesus to be born—He's already done that. Jesus has already carried our sins away—Jesus has already put us and our world to rights. No, what we are waiting for is the full consummation of all that. What we are waiting for is for Christ to come and make all things new once and for all. We have faith that Jesus has redeemed this planet of ours and each one of us, but now we find ourselves stuck in a sort of tension, an in-between state, a now-and-not-yet reality. And waiting for that to come true, well, it's not easy, is it! Our whole lives can feel like one big Advent.

After all, tell me if this isn't your daily experience—every morning, you wake up to more bad news. You hear about the decline of the US dollar and the increased cost of living. You hear about the horrible crimes being committed on the other side of the world, but also the tragedies happening right here in our own backyard! Maybe you even hear that Mom's been diagnosed with cancer; you get the report that your sister-in-law still isn't talking to you; you come to learn that your company's downsizing . . . *again!* Then you go to the Scriptures, or you hear it in church, that Jesus has fixed all that—the pain, the sin, the death, the brokenness, and separation—Jesus Christ has put all that right side up again—but you look around and don't see it, your soul cries out with the psalmist, “How long, O Lord?”

Can't you just feel it—deep down in your bones? Isn't your heart aching for it, your spirit longing for it? Just listen to your body, and you'll hear it in every ounce of your being! I mean, what is it that *you're* waiting for the most? Me? I'm looking forward to getting those six pack abs I've always wanted, when Jesus comes back and gives me that new perfect body He's promised.

But seriously, what is it; what are you most looking forward to? World peace, people finally getting along? No more feeling the heavy burden of guilt ever again? Never having to say goodbye to another loved one? Maybe you just want to feel healthy for once, not so sick all the time? Finally being happy, that cloud of depression lifted? What promise of God can't you wait to have fulfilled?

When you stop to think about it, our little window of waiting is nothing compared to the first people. After all, if the Lord comes back in our lifetime, most of us will only have waited a handful of decades. Put that up next to Adam and Eve, and I think you'll agree that they win by far more than a nose. At the start of the Bible, already in the third chapter, when God finds them hiding behind bushes out of fear and shame, He calls them out and makes a wonderful promise to them. God says that He's sending them a Savior, one of their own offspring in fact, who will defeat the serpent, pry the world from its jaws, and suck out the venom of sin and death that have poisoned all things. Imagine hearing such a promise, expecting full-well to find it come true in the course of your life!

So, Adam and Eve kept watching and waiting for it to happen. In fact, when Eve's first child was born, she exclaimed, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” Now, there are better translations that help clarify the point, but think about it—why would Eve go out of her way to say the Lord has anything to do with the birth of her son? Could it be that she thought this boy would grow up to be God's gift to her of a Savior? Of course, this baby's name was Cain . . . and we all know how *that* went! But I can just picture her hoping, wishing, praying with each subsequent child—Abel . . . then

Seth—“Is this the promised One!” The Bible doesn’t tell us how many years Eve lived, but it does say Adam spent 930 of them waiting for God’s promise to be fulfilled. Looking back at history, you and I know the Messiah wouldn’t be born for close to another 4,000 years.

I’ve also got to wonder about Mary. This morning we heard the angel Gabriel tell her that she’d be the one to bear that Savior of the world. I love that picture we have up on our church’s Facebook page—the one with Eve and Mary facing each other. Eve’s expectant eyes and hopeful hands are fixed on Mary’s very pregnant belly. Just think of the joy that must’ve been overflowing in that heart of hers! But now, it’s Mary’s turn to wait—not quite 4,000 years, but a wait nevertheless.

I remember all of Jeni’s pregnancies, kind of like Christmas as a kid, it just seemed like an eternity before the baby would be born. People would ask, “Is the nursery all set?” . . . “Got everything you need yet?” . . . “Ready for that baby to arrive?” To me, it just felt like a hurry-up-and-wait kind of situation. So, imagine hearing the news that THE MESSIAH WOULD FINALLY ARRIVE—after all that time!—but it would be . . . *another . . . nine . . . months!*

But I think out of all those who’ve had to wait, nobody’s had it worse . . . than God. After all, we’re told that this was His plan from before the foundation of the world. Before Adam and Eve were even made, God was more than ready to fix their problem. Yet, there were the six days of creation, then the Fall, then four thousand years of dealing with difficult people, then after His Son did come and die and rise again it has been another two thousand years on top of it all . . . and counting! And this is the God who can’t stand unholiness and death—here He’s been having to endure it all this time! This is the God who wept over the death of His friend Lazarus; who showed mercy to the dumb, deaf, and blind; who ate compassionately with sinners and tax collectors—seeing His beloved people this way, His heart must’ve been in constant pain. This is the God who suffered in agony, died on a cross, was buried in a tomb because He loved the world that much—how long would it have to be before He could see all that hard work finally pay off in the end? It must be so hard for God—I just can’t even imagine. He loves you and me so much—to think of what He has to go through for us every single day. The wait must be excruciating.

Every Christmas, when I was young, there was always one thing that made the wait just a little easier. In the weeks, especially the days leading up to Christmas, I would see the presents start to pile up under the tree. That was the promise that any time now, the moment I was waiting for would finally arrive. It was a sign, a seal, of a future promise breaking open in the present time. Each one of those presents was a nudge of encouragement to keep going, that no doubt Christmas was indeed coming. I mean, I could see it with my own two eyes—it was right there under the tree! And one day, I’d get to open those very same presents!

God knows all about the wait, and God also knows how to make the wait just a little easier. He Himself, has a constant reminder of what’s in store for Him and His universe on the Day of the Fulfillment. He gets a taste of that with each new person who gets baptized into His kingdom. Every time someone is born again as a child of God, God gets a glimpse of the great multitude which no one can number, from every nation, tribe, people and language, who will one day stand before the throne and before the Lamb. In fact, we’re told that the reason He’s taking so long is because He wants all to hear the Gospel of what He’s done for them in Jesus Christ. And so, as more and more are received into right relationship with Him, He gets a little bit closer and a little bit closer, and it’s enough for the time being.

He does something like that for Adam and Eve. For the first time feeling naked and ashamed, their sin exposed, God puts a present under their tree. He covers up that sin and shame with animal skins, making the first sacrifice, a kind of down payment on His promise of the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world.

And as Mary herself waits, eager to meet her Savior, God also puts a present under her tree. He causes her baby bump to grow. With the rounding of her abdomen, with each stretch mark, with every little kick, she gets a new reminder of the salvation that’s about to be unleashed.

But as for you, you get this Christmas story as your present under the tree—your sign and seal, your down payment of what’s to come. God’s already kept His promise once, He’ll surely keep it again. He came into the world that first Christmas, and any day now you will enjoy an eternal Christmas as He comes back for good. One day, one day soon, the

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Luke 1:26-38

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time will come for you to pull off the ribbon, peel back the wrapping paper, and to open wide the box of your full redemption!