

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
December 5th, 2021 – Second Sunday of Advent
Luke 3:1-6

Now that we are well into the Advent season, we can ask ourselves what exactly are we waiting for? The coming of whom or what? That's the meaning of the word, *Advent*. A coming of something special. Many think of this as the coming of Christmas Day. Perhaps, we look forward to seeing family and friends, the exchange of gifts, the sharing that often takes place around Christmas. But we can also focus on a deeper meaning of the feast, the coming of Christ into our world.

Recall that there are three arrivals of Christ that are part of this Advent season. The first is the Incarnation or the actual birth of Christ in Bethlehem. The second focuses on Christ coming into our daily lives. And the third is often referred to as *the final coming*.

Today's gospel positions his birth in the historical record (made specific by naming the rulers at that time). We recall his first arrival over two-thousand years ago at a particular time and place. This description contrasts with narratives that often begin with a phrase like "once upon a time." Luke's gospel presents the description of Christ's coming at a specific time and place. In the same kind of time that we live in, a time with a date, a specific moment under the conditions on Earth at that time. A good question is whether that first coming was God's only entry into human history. Or is there more? There is!

That brings us into reflection on the second kind of spiritual coming, namely Christ coming to each of us during our lifetime. And just like his first coming, we might be able to locate this coming at a specific place and date. This coming can happen at any time in our lives - and hopefully, more than once. And attention to everyday divine coming should be our major concern during this season of Advent. For me, Advent is the best season for quiet prayer.

Lastly, there is the final coming of Christ. And we can think about this coming in two ways. The ancients liked to describe this third coming in the religious language of their time. Scholars called this approach "apocalyptic." It was imagined as a mighty entrance of Christ in spectacular fashion. Christ's coming would initiate "the end of the world." But we can also think of this as the end of our own lives when we will meet God in Christ face to face. This is our greatest hope. To be united with God and all those with whom we shared life on Earth. We can hardly imagine anything greater than this wonderful family reunion.

David M. Thomas, PhD

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
December 12th, 2021 – Third Sunday of Advent
Luke 3:10-18

When I was a kid, I loved fires. Each fall our family would rake piles of leaves and set them afire along the front curb of our street. (This was before people even thought of air pollution.) There were also vacant lots scattered around our neighborhood, and as the grass and brush dried after summer, small fires were often started by mischievous boys as a way to cause some local excitement. I must admit to participating in these pranks. One of the stupid thing I did back then was start a fire in a pile of old cardboard boxes in our family's basement. Fires fascinated me and they still do. We have a small gas fireplace in our home and hardly a day passes when I don't sit before it, fascinated by the dancing flames.

I also confess to a strong interest in cosmology, the study of the universe. In 2017 I was overwhelmed by witnessing first-hand a total eclipse of the sun that swept across the United States. The path of totality was a mere 150 miles south of our current home. The fiery sun was temporarily blocked from view by our moon for a little over two minutes. To me it felt like an instant and a step into eternity, all at the same time.

All these experiences are factored into how we might interpret today's gospel where the baptism of Jesus is contrasted to the baptism of John the Baptist. John, himself, described the baptism brought by Jesus as the work of God's Holy Spirit. And this baptism was accompanied by fire. Why was this baptism described in that way? Why is it connected with fire? There are likely many explanations, but here's one I find helpful.

On my study wall hangs a picture given to me years ago by one of my students with a striking photograph of a sunrise accompanied by words drawn from the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, revered Jesuit priest and scientist. It reads, "Someday, after mastering the waves, the tides and gravity - we shall harness for God the energies of love and then for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire."

Baptism, fire and love. What a gift from God! Jesus came not only to offer us eternal life, but to teach us the most potent source of life-giving energy here on earth, namely the energy that is released in each act of genuine love. Such love combines the inseparable love of God and love of neighbor. God's Spirit and presence enters creation whenever we truly love others

. Thus, we can think of Advent as the great season of love, a message that is also at the heart of celebrating Christmas.

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The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
December 19th – Fourth Sunday of Advent
Luke 1:39-45

Will be sent soon.

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The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
December 25th - 2021 – The Nativity of the Lord
Luke 2:1-14

Coming.

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The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
December 26th, 2021 – The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
Luke:41-52

Also coming.

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