

The Advent of Advent

Intro. How do *you* get into the spirit of this season? We have so much to do in so little time that the anticipation of Christmas can be lost or run over like the sales clerk who opens the doors on Black Friday. There's the pressure of figuring out what gift to get the important people in our lives, then slogging through crowded stores, coming up with holiday menus and preparing for visitors. It is sometimes difficult for *me* to find the spirit of excitement. I look at the seven or eight penance services over the next three weeks, multiple Christmas masses and homilies plus whatever just happens. For some people there is little or no excitement in the season due to various family tragedies. So how can we find some connection to this extra-ordinary time of the year? Our bible study group shared some ways to get "in

the spirit": decorating the house, shopping for gifts, sending Christmas cards, looking at the beautiful lights and various books of prayers. I noticed several of these ideas are the same ones that also cause stress for other people. To find the Christmas spirit, I look at the Christmas lights, write a few cards, put up my real tree and try to make some quiet time for reflection on what the Lord's coming to earth has done for me. There are also many digital ways. One is called "The Best Advent Ever." It's free. Each week an email comes with videos and reflections for the season. See the bulletin for how to get it.

I. This new year we switch to the gospel of Mark which is the earliest one, written around 65 A.D., for non-Jewish Christians [Introduction to Mark, *The Catholic Youth Bible*, p. 1167]. The gospel's

message was first heard by people living in terrible times. They needed encouragement to persevere through trials and persecutions for their faith in Jesus. It is a message for us in our own struggles today. The Lord told his disciples to be alert, to stay awake while waiting for his return. Our culture doesn't encourage us to wait. It screams, "NOW!" It started the Christmas season around Halloween and ratcheted up the frenzy on Black Friday, but will come to a screeching halt on December 25, and on December 26, many Christmas trees will be on the street. Just like that, it's over. On to the next thing.

Concl. Today we think being *alert* is listening for the "ding" of a new text or email. Waiting for the Lord is a bit more difficult because we have been waiting for him over two thousand years and we tend to get bored waiting. In the gospel, being alert

means being *awake* to what is going on in our world and responding as Christ would. We can try to bring the spirit of this season to people who have lost the excitement of Christ being born. And in doing so we might re-discover the excitement for *ourselves*.