

The purples and blues
that the church wears at advent
are the deep, longing colors
of the in between times
the color of a winter sky, at dusk or dawn.

They are not the festive colors
draped around the world
at this time, the
bright reds and greens,
silvers and golds,
already trumpeting a monarch's birth.

Instead we, the church, wear
the blues and purples of advent,
colors that are the hues of our longings,
the longings often unspoken, or unnamed
that many of us feel during this time
of advent in a world already
declaring Christmas.

Samuel Torvend,
a Lutheran Scholar
tells us that "Because we know
that Christ has been born, has died,
is risen and will come again,
the central thing of advent for us
is not the preparation for a birth
that has already taken place.
Instead it is our continuing
awaiting and preparing

for the incarnation among us
as the prince of peace, the son of justice.
Yet we know that if we ask
what makes for justice in our land,
we will be met with opposition.
It is easier to celebrate a liturgy
of nostalgia that looks
to a birth in the distant past
than it is to celebrate
the prophets call
to act with God's own holy justice.”

I think he is right.
In the world around us,
the music of the world
is nostalgic –
It's about remembering, not proclaiming.

It seems our church season is out of sync
with the rest of the world during advent.
We struggle to balance
Our beautiful advent music
with the 24/7 Christmas music
on radio stations and dish TV.
It is hard to be countercultural
when the world is driving
itself crazy with celebration.

For Christians,
Advent joy is dark, soft and quiet.
It is subdued, and earnest,

poised and waiting,
hoping and making ready.

It has been compared
to the final months of pregnancy,
a time of yearning and waiting,
a time to dream of God.

So, we are rarely as out of step
with the world
as we are during advent,
and it is ironically the one time,
when the world is open, perhaps,
to a Christian story.
The story of Christ's birth,
is at least the background set
for the secular Christmas play
the world puts on.

And what a play it is!
The stores began taking down
jack-o-lanterns and plastic mummies
as the aisles began filling
with Christmas trees and singing reindeer.

Where's your Christmas spirit,
the frenzied shoppers ask the church
as we preach about Advent waiting
while they dive into sale racks
and load carts with glittering packages.

Why aren't you singing Christmas carols
friends and neighbors ask
as the radio stations mix
O Holy Night with the laugh track
of Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer.

Who is it you're waiting for?
Those lonely neighbors
and despondent friends
ask as they lament about
the empty feeling that Christmas gives them,
from the first of November into the new year
or they note the hollow satisfaction
of a consumer oriented Christmas
full of frenzied good cheer.

Who are we waiting for? They ask.
Who indeed?
We are not waiting for Santa,
although I am a friend of Santa
and always have been!
We are not even waiting
for the birth of a child.
Although we do celebrate
that a child was born for us
once before.
But that joy will come later.

For now, we await the son of man,
to come again.
We await the prince of peace

and the son of justice
to come into our world
and bring his reign of peace and mercy with him.

We await his coming and prepare
our hearts and lives
to receive his kingdom
even as we work here and now
to bring about the kingdom
with our own peace and mercy.

And yes, we marvel anew
into our world, our lives, our flesh
and be one of us, save all of us,
love each of us.

There is a lot of discussion
about waiting at Advent.
Theological scholars, far smarter than I,
debate the season of advent
and the timing of our waiting,
noting how hopelessly out of step
we are with the cadence of the world.

Most scholars today still value
and advocate for waiting
and watching at Advent.
But a few are proposing
a change in time –
seeking to have Advent moved to November,
so that we might celebrate

the Christmas season for the month
of December, along side the world.
The world is hungry for Christ
in December, they say,
and we should give them
the story while they are ready to listen.

But isn't the world
always hungry for Christ?
The world is urgently hungry
for Christ born and died for us ... always.
The world struggles with
the darkness and emptiness
of any day of life lived
without Emmanuel,
Christ with us.
But our message is big enough
to allow room for the waiting,
the mystery dazzling enough
to demand alertness,
and to designate a time
of watchful examination
of our world and our selves.

In our Isaiah passage
we hear our current longing
for Christ's coming in the
ancient words of Israel longing for God,
"O that you would tear open
the heavens and come down.
So that the mountains

would quake at your presence!”

There are many time we cry out
for the shock and awe of God’s presence.
But advent is less about shock
and more about awe.
It is a time of pregnant darkness,
a deep alertfulness
that awakens to the slow
and peaceful dawning of the light.

That is our advent longing as Christians.
Advent Prepares us
for the dawn of Christmas,
while also turning us to watch
the horizon for the return of Christ,

John Van de Laar,
creator of sacredise, a liturgical blog
says that “This season places us
squarely in the in-between time.
As we celebrate this season,
we discover ourselves in the moment
between the incarnation and the eschaton –
the coming of Christ as a human child,
and the return of Christ in glory.”

It seems all we can do
is bend our hearts
to the time frame of eternity,
and our eternal god, and wait.

Waiting is a stranger to most of us.
It is not often that I need to wait for things I want.
So this advent, I am going to wait
on behalf of those in this world
for whom waiting is an intimate friend.
Those who wait in line daily for food or water.

Those who wait for medicine to arrive,
for a priest to come, for a rescue.
I will wait this advent in prayer for
those who wait to die,
or who wait with the dying.

I pray for those who wait
for release from prison
or who wait for deliverance
from violence and evil.

I will wait for those
who yearn for the Christ child
and for Christ the King
to bring his kingdom of justice and love –
who yearn for this with the passion
of the oppressed
and the agony of the afflicted
or the despondency of those
who have given up all pretence.
of waiting or hope.

This advent, I am bringing the world
into my prayer life and waiting

with those I do not know.
With God's help,
I will keep awake at the door post,
and do the work my master
has left me to do in his household
and pray in thanksgiving
and anticipation
or the coming of Christ,
the child and the king.

May the blues and purples of Advent
wrap you in joyful anticipation
and peaceful acceptance
of waiting and watching for our King this season.
Amen.