

ADVENT—WEEK 2

The Second Sunday

“I am ... the truth” (John 14:6).

The smiling figure of the Infant of Bethlehem is a consolation to many people. What could be less threatening than a little baby?

And yet, that Bambino Gesù is the Son of God. When we see a newborn infant, the person has existed for only nine months. He or she has had little chance to function. The personality—the means by which the person interacts with the rest of the world—has hardly developed at all. Already there are the first cries, the first confrontation with reality. Soon there will be first smiles. A new person is beginning who will exist forever. For this reason every child conceived and born is a mystery.

But the Child of Bethlehem is not a new person. He always existed. He did not *become* God; He has always been God. Do not be deceived by His physical dependency. His body, like those of all new infants, must be held and supported. But His Person comes from beyond time and space and all limitations. His mother’s heart is filled with the joy of all good mothers, but she also adores. As a devout Jew, she knew what it meant when the celestial messenger said to her, “He ... will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David ... and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:32–33).

Here is the first test of faith for the believer. Here is the mystery of God, and men dismiss it now as once they found no room for Him in

the inns of Bethlehem. His coming is so shrouded in mystery, His being so incomprehensible: the human and divine, so incompatible, are now united. But we want to take the easy way out. It is a myth, a fairy tale.

This Child will grow to be a man. He will speak the truth as no one has ever spoken it. "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37). Truth must always be received with joy, awe, and gratitude. This is how we must receive this Child and learn from Him, because He will say, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (Jn 18:37).



Prayer

Jesus, my Savior, teach me the truth. Speak to me in the depths of my heart that I may return prayerfully in my thoughts to the humility of the manger. Let Your grace drive away my fear of a humble God with the body of an infant and the soul of a human child linked to the Person of God. Be the truth for me. Let me bow my stiff neck before the living Truth, which is so far beyond my limited mind. Amen.

ADVENT—WEEK 2

Monday

“Behold, your God will come. . . . The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped” (Isaiah 35:4-5).

Any serious person looking back thoughtfully on a few decades of life will realize that even with the best of teachers and guides we have been blind to many truths, or at least to their meaning. This is why we read the Scriptures and especially the Gospels over and over again. As our eyes open to the truth, we learn more and more each time we read them.

Sometimes books of the saints can do the same thing. For fifty years I have been reading Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* and sermons, as well as the life of Saint Francis, and they are always new to me. This is because the eyes of the mind and the ears of the heart are being opened and cleared in the process of growing in the grace of Christ. His light and word never change, but we change and grow in our ability to see and hear Him.

This is why the Christian life, when properly understood, can never be boring. Boredom is a clear symptom that we are not growing, that we have lost the meaning of these words: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rv 21:5). The reasons for our blindness, deafness, and boredom are not difficult to discern. We are entranced by the sight of what is vain and passing, and captured by sounds that mean little or nothing.

Even in the most passing things we can find God’s words, but only

if we look and listen. Our desires and our hearts are impure: we want God, but we want many other things besides. It could be so easy to escape this emptiness, to find God in all that we see, hear, and experience. *The Imitation of Christ* tells us that if our hearts are pure, every creature will be for us a mirror of God and a book of holy teaching.

Why, then, don't we change? Because we cannot change, we cannot escape our blindness and deafness until we are healed by Jesus Christ. "Lord, that I may see," said the blind beggar of Jericho. Advent is a time to begin again, to appreciate, to value above all other things the coming of Him who is the light of the world for blind eyes and the Word of God for deaf ears. Come, Lord Jesus!



Prayer

O Christ Jesus, You and You alone are our truth. You help us to know things as they are. Help us to measure all our plans, all our values, all our desires by Your words and truth alone. If we are called to teach someone, may we teach them only Your truth. If we learn from someone, may we learn only the truth which You taught and proclaimed. In this world noisy with its false ideas, with its long lies and silly questions, open our ears to You, the Truth, which never changes. Amen.

ADVENT—WEEK 2

Tuesday

“Lord, that I may see” (Mark 10:51).

The mysterious Child of Bethlehem would one day call Himself the light of the world and promise that those who follow Him would not walk in darkness. Many times in Scripture He is referred to as the light. A light is of no use to us unless we walk by it or see things in it. An unbelieving time, even if it “values” religion and treats believers with some respect, is without the light of life. No one can live and function effectively unless there is true light.

Some kinds of light are not true light. False lights, like a bonfire seen in the desert at night, have caused souls to perish, guided by a light that led them miles away from the safe trail. This is not true light. Similarly, dim light blends color and shadow in a way that reveals some things but obscures others. This is not true light, either. There is also dangerous light, like the sunlight that in excess can cause illness and even death.

Jesus is the true light, unlike any earthly light. His divine nature brings with it the promise of the light of endless day. Perhaps you have sometimes followed false lights or seen the reality of life only in the confusion of light and shadows. It is not unusual for experienced people who started on the road of life with enthusiasm to realize that they have followed false lights, or dim and confusing lights.

Advent is a time of enlightenment. The glitz of the worldly holiday is so painful to the eyes of the soul that we close our bodily eyes and

try to find a light within. The divine light of Jesus Christ—the light that the darkness cannot overcome—is shining, however obscurely, in every soul enlightened by grace.

Those who live completely unaware of the divine light within them ought to examine their lives carefully to see whether they are indeed growing in the grace of God at all. Once the light of Christ begins to guide our steps, to shape our thoughts and words, to shine on every blessing we have received, then we will walk in the light like children of the light.



Prayer

Light of the world, Light of life, shine on me and those dear to me and on all the world. Open our dull eyes and focus our vision on Your presence all around us. Help us to see those we love, those we know, those in need, in the light of Your love for us all. Draw our vision away from vain and passing things, and help us to see Your presence ever more clearly and to rejoice in Your light. Amen.

ADVENT—WEEK 2
Wednesday

*“And a little child shall lead them”
(Isaiah 11:6).*

Children are fascinated by the figure of the Divine Child. They look at the Christmas crib and wonder: What child is this? Why is He so important? Even children growing up in families deprived of faith or religious observance wonder about the Christ Child. Why do so many people celebrate his birth?

In a useless attempt to relate to those without faith and to make the Scriptures less challenging to modern people, some Christians try to minimize the mystery of Christ. They can even pretend to tell you what the Christ Child knew or did not know. However, this Child did not come into being in His mother’s womb like all other children. He always existed in the mysterious infinity of the Trinity. He comes to lead us. He began to lead us from the moment of his mysterious conception. And He leads the people of God forever. His reign shall have no end.

Let this thought, that Christ is God, startle you. Admit any difficulty to yourself. And then meditate on the Word of God, and observe those who knew Him well or who, like Saint Paul, encountered Him after His resurrection from the dead. Read what the saints have said about Him for twenty centuries. He leads us! We do not lead Him. He who alone knows the Father, teaches us.

We do not know more about Him than is necessary for us to know. Can a mortal man know God? Can the little mind of an infant

contain knowledge of the eternal, the infinite? How can He lead us unless He knows? Divine knowledge does not break into His human consciousness. It's quite the reverse. He began to know things in a human way; He always knows them in a divine way that is utterly mysterious to us.

As we think of His coming, we must make a decision. Either we accept His mysterious being and fall on our knees in adoration or we decide that we are going to figure all this out. Either He leads us or we stand around being puzzled by Him. What do you think is your proper response and attitude? You need to decide this, because He comes.



Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You promised to send us your Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Send Him in abundance that He may teach us to pray, as we ought to pray, in adoration. Help us whenever doubts come, doubts that arise from the foolish belief that our minds can measure eternity and the things of God. Give us Your Holy Spirit that He may be our interior teacher. And increase our faith. Amen.

ADVENT—WEEK 2

Thursday

*“When you see this, your heart will rejoice”
(Isaiah 66:14).*

If you ask most people what December is about, they are likely to say, “Getting ready for Christmas.” But go one step further and ask what *this* means. They will mention buying presents, preparing for guests, or visiting family for the holidays. If you say, “What about celebrating the mystery of the birth of the Son of God?” they will eye you suspiciously and with a tinge of embarrassment say, “Of course. That too.” It was not always this way.

Older people can remember when there was real excitement. As children, we fasted from candy and made little sacrifices for the Christ Child. We saved what little we had to buy presents but also to give something to the poor or to the Church. And we were excited. We all knew of course that Christ was born long ago, but somehow this remembrance made it seem that He was coming again to us.

I recall serving Midnight Mass at the Dominican Sisters’ mother-house and, looking up on Christmas Eve on the way to the chapel, there was a large bright star. I do not now know whether it was the planet Jupiter or Venus in the clear, cold sky. I literally jumped when I saw it. Jesus was coming to our town.

Some call this the magic of Christmas. It’s not magic, of course. Magic is a trick—the appearance of something that actually is not there. Christmas is a mystery: that which is intangible, unseen, is

really there. Christ is with us every day whenever we decide to turn to Him.



Prayer

Lord Jesus, increase our faith. Draw our eyes away from unimportant things and our hearts from what is shallow. Help us to feel the joy of the shepherds or the Magi. Give us a taste of the wonder of Mary and Joseph. Help us to share with those we love and all those we know the truly good news: The Lord comes. Amen.