

“Draw Near to Wonder”

Luke 21:25:36

We start this journey of Advent with a grim kind of scripture about the realities of suffering in the world. When we think of Christmas and the birth of Jesus, we normally think of beautiful images of the babe in the manger and the loving parents watching over him. We think of the shepherds rejoicing, the star shining brightly, and the magi traveling from afar to bring their gifts to the Christ child. We may also think of the words of the prophets about the coming of the Savior. But today, we begin with these images about the end of the world.

The story of the coming of Christ starts with a world gone mad, a world of deep suffering and pain. The language found in this chapter is often called apocalyptic about the end of times. The communities that produce these visions are usually themselves subject to tyranny and persecution. Apocalyptic language made sense to them. Those who have endured (or still endure) oppressive situations relate to apocalyptic literature because of their personal experience of suffering. Right now, we can relate to this language because the pandemic is making it feel like we are living in the end times. The language of the end of the world connects deeply to the brokenness of our world. Jesus knew about suffering and about people having to worry about survival. He knew all too well what it meant to live in deep fear and under a great threat. Jesus describes the end-times telling the disciples that there will be natural disasters, human-brought disasters, and continuing persecution of the church. Jesus describes here the culmination of the clash between those who follow the way of the kingdom of God, the community of Jubilee and the systems and people of society that battle such a world because they want to dominate, exploit, and oppress.

And yet in the midst of this brokenness and in this language is hidden a powerful message of hope. We are invited to keep watch! We are invited to draw near to wonder! We are invited to see the world through the eyes of faith because through the eyes of faith we not only see the world ending, but we also see it being reborn. To the average observer, the world may look like it is ending, but to those who look through the eyes of faith, the world is being reborn and we are invited to breathe deeply and do the hard work of rebirth. With the eyes of faith, the followers of Christ are invited to renew their vision for God's justice in the world. They are invited to see with new eyes the realities of the world, so that they can join God's mission of transforming them through love.

Advent is the season of being awake, preparing the way of the Lord, and of drawing near to wonder. Part of our preparation is our way of seeing the world. The way we read the news, the way we see the world, the way we look at others are all connected to our sense of being awake to the wonder and mystery of God's presence and greatness. The kingdom of God as a reality of Jubilee will not be accomplished unless we are able to see as God sees. Through the eyes of God, we can see the pain of the world and work for justice without having to be limited by ideology, political affiliation or even personal preferences. Through the eyes of God, we can see how our attachments to familiar ways of being and false securities often don't bring new life. Through the eyes of faith, we can

see that the road ahead is filled with new possibilities; ones never imagined before because God is the one who is infinitely creative and resourceful.

So this Advent the invitation is to draw close to God through wonder. Take time to breathe and to wonder with anticipation about the mystery that is being reborn in our world today. As I think of the words of Jesus, I remember a story about the power of God to bring healing to our world. Once upon a time a man visited a city that he had never been to before and decided to explore it. The main street wasn't that different from the main street of other cities and so he started to explore the back streets. As he walked along, he noticed a sign overhanging a shop that read "Nothing Broken Beyond Repair." The shop specialized in repairing broken items and there was a steady stream of people going in; children carrying toys, men carrying tools and women carrying various household items. The people were young and old, well and not so well off and of every ethnic group imaginable. As different as they all were though, they shared one thing in common; entering the shop they looked sad because something special to them had been broken. Upon coming out though, they all looked so happy because whatever had been broken had been made whole again. That sign, "Nothing Broken Beyond Repair" offered them hope and shone like a beacon in the darkness.

So this season comes to us at a time of great darkness in our human history. Yet, we know that new things are always born in the dark and that nothing is broken beyond repair!

We are going to imagine the scene of the birth of Jesus and enter in our hearts so that we may see the world from the vantage point of something new being born beyond our imagining. We will draw near to the wonder of that birth. (Adapted from a meditation written by Fr. Thomas Catcci)

"With your eyes still closed. Travel past the sunset and into the darkness of a winter in ancient Israel gliding over a huge desert. You can see a large cliff ahead of you. Come to rest on that cliff overlooking the desert. You are alone and very safe. Nothing can harm you. Look around you...ahead of you is the vast expansive desert outlined in moonlight if you look with care the darkness of the night is broken with a slight flow at the horizon the final curtain of the day. Breathe deeply...notice how clean the air is...how clear...how sweet. Overhead you can see a multitude of stars...so many stars As if you are standing in the middle of...and yet beneath...all the constellations... Clusters of stars twinkle and blink above you...

Turn around and see the most wondrous gathering of stars imaginable... There to your right... A star that seems brighter than the rest near the horizon... As if four or five stars cluster together...An incredibly bright mark in the sky... One or two stars in the cluster...seem to hang a little lower than the others as if pointing to the earth...Pointing to someplace in the desert. They blink they pulse...as if they want you to notice something special...You search...leaving the cliff...lifting up from the ground...gliding toward those bright stars on the horizon...Follow your instinct...follow your curiosity...follow the star...Continue on...Gliding to the countryside...Up ahead a ridge of small hills...Then coming nearer, you see openings...the entrances to caves...One seems to glow...lit with

a large campfire at the entrance...And above...the star cluster seems to point here... As if you were standing directly beneath the tail of the star...You approach slowly...enter and look around... Everything is hushed...Step closer into the light. There are two figures...resting beside the flickering fire...A woman holds a bundled baby sleeping quietly...The husband looks so proud of his wife and newborn...He turns to you..to welcome you...to lead you...to the mother and the baby... Is there anything you want to say to him?... Anything you want to do?... The mother holds the child close to her,,cradled in her arms and wrapped in tattered strips of cloth... Then she looks up into your eyes and smiles... She lifts the cover from his face so you can see...The baby...happy...blinks...smiles... And something deep within you knows that God has been born into the world...Here...now...God has become human...become just like you...God has been born...a new baby...The light from the fire seems to make his face glow...Then the mother invites you to come closer... She raises her arms offering the child to you...She slides the new born baby into your waiting arms... You can feel the warmth...the softness...The life of God...in your arms...fragile and alive...Is there anything you want to say?... Anything you would like to do?...And the mother explains that she has been asked by God to take care of Jesus...She is to care for him until he is old enough to be given to the world...But she needs your help... Can you?...Can you help care for this child of God?... Can you help God grow?...Can you care for him with love?...Mary gently and carefully takes the baby back into her arms. She tells you that you also have God within you... And God must grow there too...Your task is to bring God to the world as well...Mary asks if God can use your hands to help others... She takes your hands and blesses them making them holy. Then she asks if God can use your ears to hear the cry of others...Then she gently blesses your ears, anointing them. She asks if God can use your heart to love others. And she softly touches your heart to consecrate your heart to God...She hugs you in her arms with the infant baby... And thanks you...Be at peace...Know that God will always remain within you... And will never leave... God will always love others through you... Know how sacred you are... Feel the loving heart of God within you. And be at peace..." Amen.