Education and Formation Ministry
of The Riverside Church

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2025

"WHAT CAN BE DONE WHILE WAITING"

Week One: Hope

Candle: Hope

Suggested Hymn: *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*

Leader:
Tonight we light the first candle, the candle of **Hope.**
In a world where many feel forgotten or unseen, we remember that God shows up in unexpected places — in ordinary people, in small acts of courage, in dreams that seem impossible.

All:
We light this candle as a sign of our hope that God is still making all things new.

(Light the purple Hope candle)

Leader:
May this light remind us that our waiting is not empty. Hope grows when we imagine a world that welcomes everyone — especially those the world overlooks.

All:
Come, Emmanuel. Bring hope to our lives and to our world.

November 30: An Invitation

The Education and Formation Ministry at The Riverside Church invites you to take this holy season of Advent as a time to live into the waiting. Prophets told of a longing that echoed deep in God's people: For change. For justice. For God to see them and hear them. For a chance to be reconciled. For the valleys to be lifted and the rough places plain. They waited, and they waited, and they waited. In Jesus, many saw the fulfillment of the longings of past, plus a taste of salvation in ways we hadn't even anticipated.

And yet, we still wait. We still long. Maybe that's why we step into Advent each year, and celebrate Christ's coming each year, rather than a done-once-and-for-all kind of holy arrival.

What are you waiting for? And what are your longings, today? For yourself? For your family or your neighborhood? For our church? For the world? The Holy Spirit calls; what is She birthing in you? In the world?

Do not be afraid of the bareness of this season– even with all the tinsel and jingle and commercial impulses trying to chase it out. If you can, light a candle each day of this season, by yourself or with someone else, and notice the contours of the darkness, and the soft glow of light, and the dance between the two. Meditate, pray, and sing with our writers in this Devotional. Their voices express vastly different experiences of waiting on the holy. But we are all waiting on the same Christ.

With thanks for the range of contributors to these reflections, from young to old. You were worth the wait!

December 1: What Can Be Done While Waiting

You can't force open a bud.
You can pause to marvel at the
petals all tightly packed, compact,
held within, barely emerging from the cloak of green.
But you can't force it open.
You can sit with that bud, and let it know
that you are alive to witness its own aliveness
waiting, brimming to break forth.
You can remind that bud of the long, many long dark hours
it spent deep within the earth,
as a dream, a hope, a whisper, a promise.
With your own long deep breath,
you can remember to that bud
how water is even now drawn up its
very stem to fill the slender stamens sequestered within.
You can sit in silence together
while the sun beams its light on closed quarters,
as if to call –
"Lazarus, come forth!"
Quietly, you can recall together the dream of what's to come.
And while you are believing and waiting and believing
sometimes you can spy the almost imperceptible
curl of a petal unfolding
and the glint of color poking out, streaming through. . .
But mostly it will happen
when you close your eyes and open them again:
there it will be – bursting forth in unabashed
inexplicable exquisite beauty –
a blossom opening itself so boldly,
so brilliantly, so divinely to the world,

proclaiming such delicate praises before your awe-filled eyes.
~~Betsey Beckman

December 2: Waiting as an Act of Faith by *Laura Harris* – Biblical Hebrew Instructor Written with gratitude for the members of Riverside's Biblical Hebrew Program, and for all who wait, learn, and grow in faith during this Advent season.

In Hebrew, the word for wait—qavah (קָוָה)—means more than standing still. It means to hope and to be tied together, like strong threads in a single cord. When we wait for God, we're holding on tightly with love and trust.

Waiting can be hard. We wait for cookies to finish baking, for a seed to grow, or for Christmas morning to finally come! But waiting can also be a time to prepare—to listen, to pray, to love, and to notice the small ways God is already with us.

Advent reminds us that waiting is not wasted time. It's the way we get ready—not just for gifts under a tree, but for the gift of Jesus who brings light and hope to the world.
"But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.
"

— Isaiah 40:3

December 3: God's People Hope
by *Alexander Simons*, 9th Grader in Riverside Youth Group

I have experienced waiting: waiting for a best friend who could be there for me during hard times and when I am sad. I also have known waiting for a coach or team that could push me past my limits and make me better, and a team that could give me a brotherhood that I haven't had in quite a while. It took me a little bit of time after the pandemic and since my uncle passed away to feel a connection like that.

My friend Micah from church helped me, and we developed a bond and became best friends. Now I have someone I can really feel. He is like a brother I never had. My high school soccer team helped me pass my limits and gave me a brotherhood. I wouldn't trade that for anything; that's something no one else can give me. They made me a better player and a better person, and helped me leave my shell to become more extroverted.

Jesus' coming brings hope to those who are waiting, whether for friendship, or to become a better person. Jesus brings peace, hope, and a light that never goes out. God's people hope, and soon enough that hope will become real to them. They just have to be patient.

December 4: Don't Rush the Wait
by *Crystal Hammon*, Riverside Intern for Digital Ministry

Theologian Dallas Willard was once asked to describe Jesus in one word. "Relaxed," Willard replied. Relaxed? Jesus was relaxed? Well, certainly not all the time, but in many difficult circumstances, Jesus does show profound peace and confidence.

The gospels give us a good sketch of what Jesus was like, a composite of his character and disposition if not his exact personality. He knew God was in charge. Therefore, he could pause to play with children, fall asleep in a storm, minister to others while he hung on a cross. Jesus had a short life, and he didn't rush through it as we often do. Because of Christ, we can have the peace of Christ regardless of our circumstances, the same peace described by the psalmist in Psalm 27:12. *"Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us."*

December 5: Waiting for a Better World by *Alejandra Argueta*, 8th grader at The Riverside Church "God wants to give us better things and in order to do that we need to have patience and wait for him to give us better things. I am waiting for there to be a better world, with more peace, a better president, and more justice.

For me, it is frustrating waiting for all this to happen because I want a better world already, and I don't want to suffer more in a world that is racist and doesn't allow certain people to be themselves, or that takes away people's homes and lives, and deports those who are innocent."

December 6: Holy Anticipation
by *Rev. Tim Dalton*, Minister for Member Care and Parish Life

Advent is the season of holy anticipation for the coming of Christ into the world. A season where we wait for Christ—not passively, but purposefully. In Luke 2, the devout Simeon and the prophet Anna waited faithfully in the temple, during dark times, not knowing when or how the Messiah would come. Yet their waiting was active: they prayed, worshiped, and watched with hope. Waiting, in the Advent sense, is not idle, but has a spiritual posture. As we prepare room in our hearts, we extend hope, practice peace, cultivate joy and demonstrate love. We light candles each week not just to mark time, but to declare that the light is coming—and is already here in glimpses, even in our dark and difficult times.

Jesus doesn't just arrive at the end of our waiting. He meets us in it. In every act of kindness, every moment of trust, every breath of longing—we are participating in the coming of Christ. So, what do we do while waiting? We live as if the redemptive promise of God is true. Because it is.

"At that moment she came, and began to praise God and speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." (Luke 2:38)

Week Two: Peace

Candle: Peace

Suggested Hymn: *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*

Leader:
We light the second candle, the candle of **Peace.**
Not a peace that ignores conflict, but a peace that speaks truth, heals wounds, and invites us to stand with one another.

All:
We light this candle seeking the peace that comes through justice.

(Light the Hope candle, light the purple Peace candle)

Leader:
May this flame guide our feet toward compassion. May it teach us to listen, to forgive, and to work for a world where every person can live safely and freely.

All:
Come, Emmanuel. Make us makers of peace.

December 7: Waiting...A Lament
by *Dr. Mojúbàolú Olúfúnké Okome*, Chair of the Education Commission

Some people are patient. I am not. I never have been. Waiting, therefore, is difficult for me. I grew up in a fiercely Christian family and attended Anglican, Baptist, and Methodist K-12 schools. The Bible verse "Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" was frequently used as an inspirational text to exhort us to be patient and confident that God would give us staying power. Nonetheless, waiting is difficult, particularly when I have to wait for something that means a lot to me.

Right now, the most important thing I'm waiting for is the miracle of having Akinwale, my nephew, who has been missing since 2014, show up—in his right mind, and with a story to tell about God's miraculous grace on his life. I'm waiting, waiting, w-a-i-t-i-n-g! I've been waiting for eleven years! Where is my nephew? Where is God? Is God listening to me? Does God care about me, and even more importantly, about his mother, my sister, his father, his sisters? Does God care about his other aunties? Does God care about his cousins? We have looked everywhere we know. We asked the police and even Interpol for help. We have prayed. Some of us have fasted and prayed. We are still praying. Where is this young man? What happened to him? What's happening to him?

As brokenhearted and disappointed as I am, I take seriously what Scripture says in *Psalm 27:14* (New International Version): "Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD. " I am waiting. I am not strong, but I am taking heart and waiting upon the LORD, confident that only God has the final word. Sooner or later, we will come to know what happened. We might yet find my nephew. We will have cause to glorify God.

Nonetheless, I am sicker now than before my nephew went missing. I became despondent and stopped striving to write books. The peer-reviewed scholarly journal that I founded and edit became an occasional publication. There was an important job advancement that I decided not to pursue. I go through bouts of depression. My sister, who used to be so bubbly, is a shadow of her old self. My nieces and nephews are traumatized, as are all members of the family. How can God approve of all this? Why is this happening to us?

I am asking these questions because of this promise in *Lamentations 3:25-26*: "The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. " The word says it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. I am quiet to the extent that most people who know me don't know that my nephew is missing. What good would it do to keep talking about it? However, I am not quiet with God. I constantly bother God to give us answers. I even tell God the answer that I want to hear—my nephew has been found! He's back! And he's well. Nothing is wrong with him! Then I doubt. I think it's okay to respond the way I am because I'm human and cannot be other than I am.

As I wait impatiently, I am also inspired by this Bible verse from *Isaiah 64:4:* "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. " This is a promise that keeps me hopeful, encouraged, trusting in the grace and goodness of God, despite the seeming unattainability of my desire to have my nephew restored to us who love him, who refuse to give up, who believe in a benevolent and gracious God.

December 8: Keep Awake!
by *Rev. Jabe Ziino*, Minister for Youth and Young Adults

"Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."

- Matthew 24:42

"The Lord will come like a thief in the night."

- 1 Thessalonians 5:2

Many early Christians expected Jesus to return within their lifetimes. Jesus's own advice to the waiting disciples: "Pay attention and stay alert!"

Our attention is one of the most precious gifts we have. What do you give your attention to?

I give a lot of attention to:

My phone and computer
Social media
The news
Politicians
Distractions

I don't give nearly as much attention to God.

This Advent, I hope to spend a little time each day just keeping awake for Jesus, trying to give my full attention to God.

Maybe Jesus is already here, and I just haven't been paying attention.

December 9: We protest because we don't want to wait
by *Juliet Owuor*, Young Adult Ministry member and Church School Teacher

Waiting just means that the next generation will wait as well, and that others will make decisions for us. We have to go after things that we want, even if we've been told to keep waiting, and waiting, and waiting.

At times I have been told to wait, even though I didn't have the things I needed. And usually the people around me did not understand my situation, because they had the things they needed. So I was told to wait. I don't think anyone actually understood what I wanted. It made me think I should just be quiet, and that someone else was going to come rescue me, or that there was going to be a magical solution.

But the things that kept coming were never for me, and were not addressing what I needed.

So I usually didn't get things until either I started them, or I voiced a critique of what needed to happen, or I found other people who understood what my needs were, and they had created a solution.

But I could not have gotten there if I had waited, because waiting means staying in what you already have, and that doesn't work if you're in a system that wasn't built for you. And usually waiting means that you're in silence. And when you do nothing, then the other side gets louder, or wins, or continues.

I don't think it's about being patient.
Usually by the time you get to that point you haven't gotten what you needed, so waiting has only been a prison cell for you. It keeps you quiet. You just get to live in a world where it's the norm for you not to have what you need, and where you are allowing your suffering to continue for other people's comfort.

Or you start internalizing the idea that "maybe I'm not worthy of it, " or you're told "you're being impatient; you have to wait. " Or you begin telling yourself that God doesn't want you to have it.

The internalized glorification of suffering gets deeper and deeper, while the system continues to not provide, because no one is forcing it to provide.

December 10: What Kind of Hope Is Advent Hope?
by *Luvon Roberson*, Riverside Seekers Class

Planting paperwhite narcissus bulbs
My Advent practice
Awaiting their blossoms to break forth
Their beauty to amaze
Their fragrance to disrupt the senses
I wait each Advent
And, each Advent
I see anew Advent Hope
Waiting in expectation
Though silent to my ear
Though still to my eye
I believe, I feel the whisper:
Advent Hope.
Anew
Anew
Anew.

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. (James 5:7-8, NIV)

December 11: What Are We Waiting For? Our Dinner Church group shared some of the hopes and expectations they are feeling in their personal lives right now. Pray for them in their waiting.

<u>What we are waiting for right now (from the Riverside Dinner Church community)</u>

- Justice and equality for all people
- My own place to live
- Cancer operation to be over and a complete healing miracle — *Isaiah 53:5*
- A society where every person is respected, protected, and celebrated
- A restoration of personal health
- To be able to financially help my son and his new bride move into their own condominium
- It's been a long time, but I know change will come —
- Someone to love / to be loved
- Green card
- My first kiss with my romantic partner

We are all waiting on the coming of Jesus. Our longing for intimacy, for justice, for healing, for love, for belonging, for safety, for a home, for the ability to care for our loved ones, for change– these all point to a deeper, spiritual hunger. In this season of Advent, may these longings of our Dinner Church group invite you to pay attention to what YOU are waiting for, and to the spiritual hunger that lies beneath these things.

December 12: More Reflections on Waiting from Dinner Church

Learn to love the process and the work. Find joy in waiting.
- *Anonymous* Dinner Church participant

Something better than we can imagine is coming later.
- *Anonymous* Dinner Church participant

Whatever we're waiting for may not come when you want it, but it will be right on time. God is an on-time God.

Look for peace in the middle of the storm.
- *Janette Kemp*

Sometimes God asks us to wait in order to fully trust and rely upon him. Waiting can build our faith, perseverance, and character. Also, when we finally get something we have waited for, it is all the more special and appreciated.
- *Jacqueline Hopkins*

God's knowledge is far beyond what we can comprehend, and his timing is perfect. God's plan may be better than what we initially hoped for. As we wait for a big outcome or solution we can notice and celebrate the small victories along the way.
- *Shawn Salley*

December 13: Beware the "Wait" that means "Never!

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never. " We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied. "
- *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Week Three: Joy

Candle: Joy

Suggested Hymn: *Joy to the World*

Leader:
Tonight we light the third candle, the candle of **Joy.**
Not joy that pretends everything is fine, but joy that rises up even in hard times — the joy that comes from God's closeness and from loving one another well.

All:
We light this candle to remember that joy can grow even in the shadows.

(Light the Hope and Peace candles, light the pink Joy candle)

Leader:
May this light remind us that God delights in us. Joy blooms when we share life together, lift each other up, and celebrate every sign of goodness.

All:
Come, Emmanuel. Fill us with a joy that shines.

December 14: A Poem for Waiting
by *Heather Imperiale*, Riverside Children, Youth, and Families

I wait to find out if my family & I will still live here in a few days
This has been our home for years but
Today our enemy attacked
Will my defense be enough?
If my child finds out, it wasn't.

God knows already
Everything there is to know
Among miracles, the nuances of my view
God holds my life
Will I still have that in a few days?
Will I still have my child?

If the enemy wins, I won't.

But God has already won.
So I can wait.

Even when the worst I imagined happens
There is always new joy
I'll find it
in the meantime

December 15: Singing While Waiting

Rev. Leah Fowler, Minister for Intergenerational Christian Education and Formation

…he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
From the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55

Nikki Giovanni, the black American poet, wrote a poem called Dreams.

"in my younger years
before i learned
black people aren't
suppose to dream"

Giovanni wrote, she dreamed of becoming a Raelette. The Raelettes were a girl group from the 1950's, who were the backup singers for Ray Charles. She imagined she would grind up against the mic and scream,

"baaaaaby nightandday
baaaaaby nightandday" like Marjorie Hendrix did. But instead, she wrote,
"i grew and matured
i became more sensible
and decided i would
settle down
and just become
a sweet inspiration."

The irony is that Nikki Giovanni could have been described as a number of things, but a "sweet inspiration" is probably not the first phrase people would use to tell her story. She was a star of black nationalism. She was a *revolutionary.*

The words of her poetry lent pathways to connecting with the emotional experience of tragic injustices like the murders of Emmett Till and the four Black girls in the Birmingham church bombing – but her words also gave pathways to the emotional experience and beauty of black joy and black love.

Mary often gets remembered as a "sweet inspiration, " but that depiction misses how radical Mary's words were. In Mary's song, she bore the hope of a promise fulfilled. In fact, though there were still hungry and poor people around her, and proud, powerful people who would continue to oppress, she sang her song as if, in God's mercy, these injustices were already overturned. She laid out an intention Christians today should seek to follow. May your dreams during this season of waiting lead you to become a "sweet inspiration:" a vision of the world that overturns the powers of domination that seek to oppress, in favor of that which births justice, joy, and love.

December 16: Generation Z Waits
Reflections on waiting from Riverside's Youth Group

"Even though God could fix everything in a second, he wants to see if we can come together and unify because struggles make us stronger together."
-*Anonymous* Riverside youth

"Sometimes better things come along if you wait."
-*Anonymous* Riverside youth

"I'm waiting for Tuesday because there is no school on Tuesday. Waiting for Tuesday feels exciting because it's not that far away."
-*Anonymous* Riverside youth

"Waiting is a part of life. Patience is a virtue."
-*Anonymous* Riverside youth

"Sometimes we can be rewarded with greater things if we wait.
I am waiting for Christmas. It's hard because I'm looking forward to gifts and seeing family."
-*Anonymous* Riverside youth

"God will never make a promise God can't keep, but sometimes keeping this promise takes a long time. We are to remain steadfast as He does, and remain faithful as we await good things to come."
-*Anonymous* Riverside youth

"Why does God ask us to wait?
To stop and appreciate what we already have, so we can learn about something and get experience. Waiting allows for growth."
-*Karen*, Riverside Church School volunteer

December 17: Clean Your Room
by *Jennifer James Soto*, Riverside Morning Prayer Group, Hawks Board, and Scholarship Committee

"And while you're waiting, clean your room." She says, then leaves.

What room? I live in a double-wide, cardboard box near a dumpster behind a rental appliance store in a strip mall. I survey my box. No meaningless treasures cubed for public storage here. No furniture; no dust. With one hand I swipe away dirt blown in from the wind.

She peers inside. "Your room. Did you forget already? Check the mirror. He's coming."

Glancing in the small, cracked mirror, I remember:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

You are not your own. 1 Corinthians 6:19

Clean my room. Remove the clutter occupying too much space in my mind: self-doubt, fear and worry. Organize my behaviors and practices, so they align with His. Clear out the dust and debris to make room for the Holy Spirit.

Clean my room. Release anger, seek forgiveness, forgive others, forgive myself. Rekindle a friendship. Be hope to a stranger.

Clean my room.

Looking at my reflection with an open, clean heart, I smile and know that the beauty God created is me.

Clean your room. Be ready. Jesus is coming for you. And he's worth the wait.

December 18: Prayer of Reflection for Advent
by *Cheryl Iroka*, Church School Teacher

Heavenly Father,

Your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us. He is the sign of your LOVE. As we take this moment to express HOPE, ask for GUIDANCE, PEACE to our hearts, and LIGHT to our eyes, we know that you are the HOPE in our messy world. We ask you to help us slow down, focus on what really is important, and listen to your voice. Guide us in the HOPE that we have, as we know that HOPE does not disappoint, because HOPE is found in the Word of God. As your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us, help us walk in that LOVE during the weeks of Advent. We seek the JOY of your presence and ask for a great spiritual awakening and renewal as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Savior of the World.

We pray in the Name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

December 19: Wait with Faith, Hope, and Love
by *Eugene Melino*, Adult Confirmation Class Instructor

To live in history is to live in Advent. To live in Advent is to live in hope. To live in hope is to live in faith. Like the father of the prodigal son, we live in hope that our prodigal nation will return to its promise and turn away from the sins of Empire. Social justice begins with this hope, acts out of love, and is inspire by faith. To love God and neighbor, Jesus tells us, is salvation. Of faith, hope, and love, Paul tells us, the greatest is love. Nations and empires come to end, but love never ends.

December 20: There's a Song in the Air from *Sharon Pritchard*, Director of our Cherub Choir and Church School Teacher, shared this hymn as a favorite one her family sang in the season of Advent.

There's a song in the air
There's a star in the sky
There's a mother's deep prayer
And a baby's low cry.
And the star rains its fire
While the angels all sing
For the manger in Bethlehem
Cradles a king.

There's a tumult of joy
O'er the wonderful birth
For the virgin's sweet boy
Is the Lord of our earth
And the star rains it fire
While the angels all sing
For the manger in Bethlehem Cradles a king.!

In the light of that Star
Lie the ages impearled
And that song from afar
Has swept over the world
Every hearth is aflame
And the angels all sing
In the homes of the nations
That Jesus is King.

We rejoice in the light
And echo the song
That comes down through the night
From the heavenly throng
Ay we shout to the lovely evangel they bring And we greet in his cradle
Our Savior and King

- By Charles E. Szabo

Week Four: Love

Candle: Love

Suggested Hymn: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

Leader:
We light the fourth candle, the candle of **Love.**
A love that welcomes the stranger, honors every person's dignity, and refuses to give up on the world God so tenderly cherishes.

All:
We light this candle trusting that love is stronger than fear.

(Light the Hope, Peace, and Joy candles; light the last purple Love candle)

Leader:
May this flame warm our hearts and widen our imaginations. Let this love lead us to the manger, where God's love became flesh and moved among us.

All:
Come, Emmanuel. Teach us to love as you love.

December 21: God Knows When
by *Dr. Sherrie Pratt*

There is a song that says,"He may not come when you want Him, but He's an on time God." Too often we want "it" now. We are impatient. But God knows the when, where and how it should come. Trust that God will be our guide, and be prayerful and steadfast in our faith. It is in waiting that we can grow closer in our faith, especially if the situation is out of our hands. This doesn't mean not to continue to ask God for intervention or help… But wait in peace, knowing that God hears you. Amen.

December 22: Prayer of Surrender
by *Chiara D. Fuller*, Riverside Church School Teacher

Dear God,

Thank you for a new day filled with unexpected blessings.
Allow the breath in our bodies to help us take steps towards our divine purpose.
Along life's journey, please protect us and guide us with love, grace and mercy.
When the world gets to be heavy, thank you for carrying us beyond our own strength.
Give us courage to let go and let God.
We surrender in vulnerability with hands extended on high.
Peace be with us in our storms.
Joy lift our spirits.
Love be in us as we walk in your light.
Wisdom be with us in life's choices.
Thank you for a new day filled with unexpected blessings.

Amen

December 23: What If We Are The Ones?
by *Rev. Jim Keat*, Digital Minister at The Riverside Church

The season of Advent is all about waiting -- watching, expecting, anticipating -- It's easy to just say that Advent is waiting for Jesus -- come on Jesus, be born already! -- but that approach seems to miss out on all the ways he is born in us and among us and sometimes in spite of us. Advent invites us to look forward, not as some sort of countdown to Christmas presents, but looking for all the ways that we can show up to embody love and justice. Advent isn't a season that happens for a few weeks and then is behind us for the rest of the year but Advent is a way to see everything, a tinted lens that changes our vision, inviting us to watch and wait and expect and anticipate God with us all year long.

Advent is all about waiting. But at the same time, it's not. It's about realizing that we are the ones we've been waiting for. We are called to hope, peace, joy, and love, not just for someday down the road but for right here and right now, whatever your "here and now" might be.

So maybe Advent is about waiting. Instead of waiting for God to save us in the future, what if God is waiting for us to show up right now? After all, God has hands -- they're attached to your wrists. And so when we show up, that is the embodiment of God-with-us.
What are we waiting for?

December 24: To Just Be
by *Athena Wilkinson*, Riverside Young Adults

The advent theme for this year is the prompt "What can we do while waiting. " In all honesty, I am the worst person to respond to this question for I am seldom waiting. Waiting entails patience, standing by, and holding back; skills I have yet to learn. I pursue a lot of the "do" without the "wait" simply because I have so many things to complete. Yet, after sitting down with this prompt for a bit, I've come to realize that the best thing to do while we wait is to just be.

Take a moment to stabilize your breathing: inhale through the diaphragm and exhale through our nose. Sit and listen to the howl of the wind as the days start to get colder, mourning the warmth of summer while celebrating the beginnings of the Holiday season. Give your body the much needed break it so desires; take a walk in the park, try some yoga, lay in bed without your devices. Being is just as important as doing.

December 25: The Light That Meets Us in the Dark
by *Dr. Jillian Langford*, Minister for Children, Youth, and Families

Growing up in Michigan, Daylight Savings Time marked the start of long months of darkness. I remember waking before sunrise, heading to school beneath a navy sky, and returning home as the sun was already setting. It felt like I was living entirely in the dark, as if the world had suddenly switched to black and white. Even now, these early nights bring back that familiar dread: *How can I live in the darkness and wait for the light?*

That question has always met me in Advent. And now, as we arrive at Christmas—the day when the Church proclaims that the waiting is fulfilled—I still carry it with me. Christmas does not erase the darkness of our world or the shadows within us. It marks the end of a season of waiting **and** it names a truth we continue to need: that God's light has come into the darkness, not in place of it.

The birth of Jesus doesn't deny the night; it interrupts it. It reveals that God works in hidden places:

in the cold, Michigan soil where bulbs rest,
in the quiet hours in Bethlehem before dawn,
and in the parts of me still shaped by my own anxiety.

Jesus reminds us that all our worrying about how long the darkness will last "cannot add a single hour" to our lives. And creation itself keeps teaching me: the earth does not fear the night. It trusts that the light will return and grows in whatever ways it can until morning breaks.

So this Christmas, I am practicing that trust again. I am learning that God is with me in the darkness just as surely as God is in the promised light. This reminder from the late Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin remains my mantra: *Above all, trust in the slow work of God… give God the benefit of believing that [her] hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.*

May this holy day give you courage in the shadows, hope for the morning, and the deep assurance that the Light has come, and is still making its way toward you.

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