



## Advent, Loud.

We usually think of Advent as a meditative season. Hushed by a vision of Mary pondering mysteries in her heart, the Church grows still. Advent walks on tiptoe, a finger to its lips, trying not to distract anyone.

This is a season of deep, cold nights warmed by soft candles; a time of longing, for healing, for the reunion of human and divine, for justice. Advent gives a voice to this perennial longing, but in a peaceful tone. It barely breathes. It does not speak above a whisper. It waits.

We crave the silence and the calm of these four weeks, and a quiet Advent is good for us, to be sure; but a quiet Advent is surprisingly out of kilter with the typical scriptures of the season. Their decibel level is high. They suggest a ruckus, not a retreat.

First, stars fall from the sky, blood-streaked moons collide, nations groan in distress, thrown into a panic by the roaring of the ocean's roiling waves. The heavens pass away in a reverse big bang, the elements dissolving in fire.

Once we get the apocalypse out of the way, we think the season will settle down. Not so. The Lectionary texts of the three liturgical cycles rev up the ruckus. They beg God to rip open the heavens and send down torrents of justice that hit the parched earth with ear-splitting force. The Lord comes, and mountains quake; fire erupts, crackling in brushwood; water heats up until it steams and boils.

Advent is shrill with raised voices. There's John the Baptist crying in the wilderness and reaming out the brood of vipers. There's the herald running across the high mountains announcing good news at the top of her lungs.. And there's singing, there's lots of singing, enough exultation to keep you tossing and turning well into the wee hours.

No one gets any sleep in Advent texts; it's a season for insomniacs—wake up, stay awake, watch, and keep watching, heads up, on your feet, the texts demand. Even Mary doesn't sit still. The minute the angel leaves the room, Mary rushes off over the Galilean hills, headed for her cousin's house. And when she arrives, she breaks into (what else?) a great big stage number—a song so loud and disruptive it is echoing still. Meanwhile, in Elizabeth's womb, John kicks hard with a fierce and leaping joy.

It's a loud, vigorous, and purposeful season, if you go by the texts. God's sleeves are rolled up. Sweaty blacksmiths are swinging heavy hammers on clanging anvils, beating swords into plowshares in stifling forges. Heavy equipment is all lined up for the Big Dig of God, ready to bulldoze, level, straighten, build.

What are we to make of this noisy Advent? Aren't we already sleep-deprived? Aren't we already running on empty? Already too talkative, making too much noise in this world? We hardly need scriptural encouragement to talk more than we already talk, look busier than we already look. Is that what this is about? Do we need new texts for Advent that don't make such a racket, texts that conform more closely to our inclination to turn inward and hunker down?

No, not unless we want to mistake a mood for a truth. And the scriptural truth is this: Our healing is a long, hard labor; our salvation is a heavy breathing affair. Its accomplishment requires rolling up the sleeves. The approach of God in the Child sets off a festival whose riotous glee shakes the stars from their fixtures they sky; and the justice that bores into the world through his appearance makes every creature sing. Long and loud.

We ought to be attentive and still in Advent. We should wait in patience and keep a finger to our lips. We do well to tiptoe softly and use our indoor voices; but if we hush up and cease from frenzy these four weeks, let it be only so that we can better hear the noise that saves us. Let it be so that we can better feel the vibrations of the work that heals us. It would be sad and ungrateful of us to try to shush the hubbub of this most noisy season.

It would be sad and ungrateful of us not to love it for what it is—the crashing and banging of the promise God makes as it comes true.