

## Signs in the Stars

Luke 21:25-36

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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On November 6, 2005 I preached for the last time before giving birth to my first child. I had a back up plan just in case the baby decided to make his entrance early. But he did not. So, I preached that Sunday. And in the week that followed, I continued to go into the office. After all, at full term I was feeling the best I had in 9 months. Everything was ready at home. So, why not work?

Monday, November 7 was his due date. He did not arrive. Each day I woke up and wondered if *that* would be the day. Tuesday came...soon it was Thursday...another weekend rolled around. Before we knew it we were 8 days...9 days...10 days past his due date. Finally pitocin-induced-labor issued that child an eviction notice and Cameron James arrived, eleven days past his due date.

Waiting for a baby to be born...that's the kind of waiting and anticipating that we do in Advent.

And I say that not just because we are anticipating hearing the story of Jesus' birth again on Christmas Eve. But rather I say that because the waiting of this season, as our Advent devotional says, is "not like 'waiting in line,' but rather like waiting for a concert to begin, a love letter to arrive, or the stars to come out on a cold, clear night" (*Starry Nights: An Advent Devotional Full of Light and Wonder*, [saltproject.org](http://saltproject.org)). It is "a time of anticipation, expectation, and excitement" (*Starry Nights: An Advent Devotional Full of Light and Wonder*, [saltproject.org](http://saltproject.org)).

And there is something more. Advent is a time of waiting for the fullness of what will be. It is not just a season of looking forward to baby Jesus lying in a manger, to shepherds and angels, magi and stars greeting him. No, Advent is not *just* about the birth but also about waiting for everything that will follow.

And perhaps we know that feeling, too. Again, I think about waiting for our baby's arrival. While in the immediate we were thinking about meeting this little one...and in the days after his arrival we were just thinking about keeping him alive and well...but even then, in the dark of night, in the silence of star light we wondered and waited for what we would learn as we watched him become more fully himself. While not wishing away time, we were waiting not just for his birth, but for everything that would follow...for his personality, his development, his growth, even his 20-year-old and 40-year-old and 60-year-old selves. We were waiting to see who this person would become and, as Mary Oliver says, waiting to see what he would do with his "one wild and precious life."

So, what is it for which we wait in Advent? It is not one thing, but rather a both/and kind of waiting.

We wait for the birth of the baby. We wait for Immanuel, God-with-us, who we know in the person of Jesus. We wait for the familiar stories of Mary's strength and Joseph's faithfulness, of shepherds unexpectedly invited and strangers from afar bringing gifts. We wait to meet Jesus and to remember again that God came into this world in this amazing way.

*And* we wait for more than that. Because in Advent we don't only remember a story, but we wait for that story to come full circle.

We wait for the fullness of God's kin-dom, a fullness that is revealed not in the moment of Jesus' birth but in all the moments of his life.

We wait for that time when all is right again - not only in heaven, but on earth.

We wait with hope for not only what was but for what is to come, what we believe will happen, what we hope for, even against all evidence.

We wait for the experience of Immanuel, God-with-us, not just in a baby, but in the ways we experience God's presence in the bringing about of God's kin-dom, something we are invited to not only witness but to participate in.

We read a scripture today that actually comes at the end of Jesus' life. According to Luke it is positioned in the last days before his crucifixion. It is a passage that our minds and hearts struggle to know what to do with. After all, it is an apocalyptic discourse, something that points us toward the end times.

And here's the catch and something we often miss. Passages like this can feel scary or uncertain to those of us who are fortunate enough to know what it is to live with safety and security, with love and opportunity, with enough. But they are typically written in times where people are already experiencing uncertainty, destruction, and persecution. And when read from that angle, they are words of hope.

So, today as we enter Advent, as we anticipate the birth of Jesus, we also are reminded that we anticipate his life of standing in truth and love even when that wasn't celebrated. We anticipate his death as one who was killed by the state because he dared stand up to power. And we anticipate his resurrection, the celebration that says that death does not have the last word, but that everything will come full circle and the kin-dom of God will overcome.

We, like people across generations, may sometimes look around for signs. We may see things happening in the stars or in the headlines and wonder if these are signs of something cataclysmic. But Jesus, in our scripture, reminds us that more than looking for this sign or that, we are called to be committed to live from our faith daily, always doing our best to live in Jesus' loving, compassionate, and justice-seeking ways.

This Advent, we are turning our eyes to the stars. We are not doing this to become astrologers or astronomers. We are not doing this to guess if this constellation or that comet or this amazing show of Northern Lights is communicating something specific. Rather, we turn our eyes to the stars because in real and metaphorical ways, the stars have guided people for generations, whether it was the sailors out of the middle of the sea begin guided by a canopy of stars, stars guiding slaves to freedom, or those guiding foreign strangers to a young child Jesus...the stars have often led the way.

So we look to the sky and we remember God, not who sits far off in heaven, but who is all around us. We look to the sky and we remember God, who is guiding us, not only to the manger, but to the fullness of God's own kin-dom. We look to the sky and we let the stars remind us that we are part of something so much bigger than ourselves. We look to the stars and we let hope and light and wonder guide us along the way.

Advent is here. And so we wait, not passively but actively. We wait and we watch; we hope and we wonder; and we let the heart of Jesus, the light in the darkness, guide us on the way. Amen.