



ADVENT REFLECTIONS

Fr. Robert Barron



WORD ON FIRE CATHOLIC MINISTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this great Advent journey! I'm so glad you're joining me and thousands of others in celebration and prayer during this holy season.

In its simplest terms, Advent is the time we prepare for Christ. It's the great liturgical season of waiting—but not a passive waiting. We yearn, we search, and we reach out for the God who will come to us in human flesh. That's what we'll be doing for next several weeks, beginning tomorrow and lasting through Christmas.

May we spend these holy days together, journeying through Advent like the Magi on our way to the newborn king.

Peace,

Fr. Robert Barron



ADVENT REFLECTIONS



First Sunday of Advent

DAY 1: OUR TAINTED OFFERING

We all know that Lent is a penitential season, a time when Christians get in touch with their sins. But Advent has a penitential dimension, too. It is the season in which we prepare for the coming of a savior, and we don't need a savior unless we're deeply convinced there is something to be saved from.

Our first reading at Mass today, from the end of the book of the prophet Isaiah, affirms this with a whole series of images describing our sinful condition.

For example, we hear this wonderful and terrible line: "All our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind."

When we have become deeply aware of our sin, we know that we can cling to nothing in ourselves, that everything we offer is, to some degree, tainted and impure. We can't show our cultural, professional, and personal accomplishments to God as though they are enough to save us.

But the moment we realize that fact, we move into the

Advent spirit, desperately craving a savior. We become ready for the last image from today's reading: "Yet, O Lord,

you are our father; we are the clay and you are the potter: we are all the work of your hands."

"We don't need a savior unless we're deeply convinced there is something to be saved from."



First Monday of Advent

DAY 2: THE UNSATISFIED LONGING

I've always sensed that the Advent attitudes of waiting, expecting, hoping, and anticipating somehow speak to the deepest desires of our heart. That is probably because our whole existence here below is characterized precisely by this state of yearning.

The world is filled with wonderful things and experiences—deep joys and satisfactions. But we all know that nothing here finally satisfies us.

No matter how much we know, we want to know more; no matter how much we love, we want greater love; no matter how much beauty we attain, we sense that there is a perfect beauty that we haven't seen.

“O come O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel.” That great Advent hymn catches our ache. As we move into this season of anticipation, allow that ache to develop, preparing you for the satisfaction that will arrive only in Christ.

“The world is filled with wonderful things and experiences, but nothing here finally satisfies us.”



First Tuesday of Advent

DAY 3: I'M WAITING, I'M WAITING

Advent is the liturgical season of vigilance, or, to put it more mundanely, of waiting. During the four weeks prior to Christmas, we light the candles of our Advent wreaths and put ourselves in the spiritual space of the Israelite people who, through many long centuries, waited for the coming of the Messiah.

In the wonderful avant-garde German movie “Run Lola Run,” a young woman finds herself in a terrible bind: she needs to gather an enormous amount of money in a ridiculously short period of time. Throughout the movie she runs and runs, desperately trying through her own frantic efforts to make things right, but nothing works. Finally, at the moment when she finds herself at the absolute limit of her powers, she slows to a trot, looks up to heaven and says, “*Ich warte, ich warte*” (“I’m waiting, I’m waiting”).

Though she does not explicitly address God, and though there has been no hint throughout the movie that Lola is the least bit religious, this is undoubtedly a prayer. And in the immediate wake of her edgy request a rather improbable solution to her problem presents itself.

Lola's prayer has always reminded me of Simone Weil, that wonderful and mysterious twentieth-century French mystic whose entire spirituality is predicated upon the power of waiting, or, in her language, of expectation. In prayer, Weil taught, we open our souls, expecting God to act even when the content of that expectation remains unclear.

In their curious vigilance and hoping against hope, both Lola and Simone are beautiful Advent figures.

"I'm waiting, I'm waiting," they both exclaim. And so are we.

"In prayer, we open our souls, expecting God to act even when the content of that expectation remains unclear."



First Wednesday of Advent

DAY 4: WHY DOES ADVENT MATTER?

Advent matters because Jesus Christ is a savior, not just a teacher. If he is only a teacher, then you can read him any time you want and glean things from him like any other teacher. But if he's a savior, that means you have to *feel* the need for him.

If someone is trapped or held captive or in quicksand, they don't need a teacher—they need a savior. To appreciate Jesus, therefore, we have to move into the space where we understand how stuck we are, how needy we are.

The Advent hymn "O come O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel" is all about that. Until you feel that ache, the helpless yearning that someone who is addicted to drink or pornography experiences, you're stuck and you can't save yourself. Only when you hit bottom and surrender to a higher power, as in the twelve-step programs, are you ready to make progress. The same is true in the spiritual order. Advent is about moving into that space.

Our culture tells us in a million ways: "You're fine! You're great! Assert yourself and don't let people tell