



There are all kinds of waiting in life. Ten years ago, I was in my office in Brooklyn. I called my doctor's office since there had been a delay in a recent test report that I had taken. I had taken an echocardiogram several times in the past, so I was very relaxed as I waited for either the doctor or nurse to get on the phone. After about a minute or so, the nurse came on the phone and said that my doctor was away on vacation, but the other doctor in the office would call me back because they needed to talk to me as soon as possible. I immediately knew that there must be something wrong since this was not the usual routine. Although it seemed like forever, and I kept staring at the phone waiting for the red light to go on to signal a call, it was about an hour before the doctor called and told me that the test showed I would need a serious heart surgery. Ironically, once I knew the results I find I calmed down. That waiting was the longest hour of my life.

Waiting. There are all kinds of waiting. A spouses or parents are filled with anxiety when they have a son or a daughter serving in the military in a war zone. A woman in her ninth month of pregnancy has her hospital bag packed and makes sure her husband always has gas in the car. A high school senior waits with nervous expectancy for an acceptance letter from the college that he or she dreams of attending. A little boy says, *Mommy, how long till Santa Claus comes.* A bride to be says, *how will we get it all done, there are only six months until the wedding.* Waiting. We wait in the doctor's office reading year old magazines, until we get the wonderful call to go into see the doctor. Then we sit in the little room, on the medical table, staring at the scale and wondering if our physician will ever open the door. During this time of Christmas preparation, we may wait on long lines or yell out our computer for not turning on fast enough. Waiting . No doubt, you are waiting for this sermon to finally end.

This first week of Advent recalls the thousands of centuries that human beings have turned to the skies, to the sun, to the moon, to the stars, to the mountains and longed-for God. We hear the haunting words of the prophet Isaiah that captures the longing of people for God to come among them: *Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old. No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you.*

Oh, rend the heavens and come down is a prayer, a cry of great passion. Over the past year, as we see the destruction of hurricanes, the evil of dark acts of terrorism, the fear of nuclear war, we too have cried to the heavens, begging God to come down. In our personal lives, as we faced a serious illness, as we worried about growing old, as we saw a son struggle with an addiction or had a daughter have her heart broken in a bitter divorce, we have joined the Isaiah in his call for God to come among us.

Waiting. But we are not the people of ancient times. Advent for us is not a time of waiting for God to come among us. Jesus did rend the heavens and come down among us. He was born in little town named Bethlehem. He walked the dusty road of Israel for thirty-three years. He did that which is the most human of all things: he died. And then the story of our faith burst forth in resurrection on the first Easter, then to Pentecost and the continual outpouring of the Holy Spirit among us, in the Eucharist where we encounter the bread of life, in the word of God where he hears him speak, and in our faith community where we gather to celebrate weekly that *Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again*. Although we look forward with joy to the gathering of family and friends, to the decorating of the tree, to the sparkling Christmas lights, to wonderful innocent excitement of our children and grandchildren, to the sweet smell of Christmas cookies being baked, and even to the endless playing of Christmas carols, these special moments are not about waiting but about celebrating. God is with us. *His name shall be called Emmanuel, a name which means God with us*.

If I could be a Scrooge for a moment, I will tell you that before the clock strikes midnight, it will January and you will be sadly packing up your Christmas lights, seeing discarded sad browning Christmas trees on the street, nervously opening your credit cards bills, and wondering how could Christmas be already over.

So, I invite you to ponder the words of Jesus in our Gospel today: Jesus said to his disciples: *"Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come*. A key word of advent is to be watchful-to not miss the presence of God in our daily lives. We live and move and have our being in the presence of God. Say a prayer for the person to whom you are writing a card; taste that wonderful cookie, treasure the person for whom you are shopping, see the lights around your house as a sign of the one who is the light of the world, let your tree be firmly on the ground but pointing you to the heavens, explain each figure in your Christmas creche to your child or grandchild, sing *O Come O Come Emmanuel* with enthusiasm, welcome Christ into your hearts at Holy Communion, do a good deed for someone in need. Don't miss him.

John Shea, a spiritual writer, has a book of Christmas poems called *Seeing Haloes*. Here is part of one of them called *Seeing Haloes*:

*Even at Christmas,
when haloes
are being pre-tested by focus groups*

for inclusion in their mass market campaigns,

they are hard to see

But seeing haloes

Is more than a lucky sighting

It entails the advent skill

Of sustaining attention.

This is how haloes are seen

By looking into largeness

By tucking smallness

Into the fold of infinity

Haloes suffer time

Even as they show us

What happened beyond time

When haloes fade

They do abruptly fade

Abandoning us

To the sorrow of lesser light

They recede

As Gabriel departed Mary

Leaving us pregnant.