

**‘For everything a season’:  
Theology through the church year  
Session 2: Advent - ‘Why are we waiting?’**



‘God created time, and created plenty of it’  
*Irish Proverb.*

### **1. Advent and time**

Church seasons teach us that time is both linear (moving forwards) and cyclical (the wheel analogy). In Advent we look forwards, backwards, and wait in the present. Yet we are usually at our most ‘hurried’. We are concerned about ‘running out of time’ to get things ready for Christmas. This is a symptom of a wider societal trend: ‘we are always meeting deadlines, we are always short on time, we are always running out of time’ (Steindl-Rast, p. 1).

### **2. Contemplation: Waiting in time**

Spiritual authors have long explored the ‘spirituality of time’, and the need to realise that time is a gift from God, rather than a taskmaster which controls us. Time is not just chronological (from the Greek *chronos*); time is a series of opportunities and encounters (*kairos*). Waiting in prayer is about stepping out of ‘clock time’ (reactive) and into God-time (responsive). Waiting is a gift, through which we can encounter God’s renewal and strength (Isaiah 40: 31). ‘The faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting’ (TS Eliot, ‘East Coker’, *Four Quartets*)

### **3. No time like the present**

Spiritual authors speak of the ‘sacrament of the present moment’ (Jean-Pierre de Caussade): God’s eternity breaking into the ‘now’ of the present, grounding our hope for the future and enabling us to learn through the past. We can begin to see the present ‘already clothed with timelessness’ (Buechner, *The Sacred Journey*).

### **4. Time and eternity**

Time is characterised by change; eternity ‘derives from unchangeableness’ (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*). If God is unchanging then God is not subject to time. Yet the mystery we prepare to comprehend in Advent is that, through the incarnation, the eternal God dwells ‘in time’: ‘When the fullness of time had come, God sent his son, born of a woman ...’ (Gal. 4: 4).

## O Antiphons

Seven 'great prayers' in the final week of Advent, each ending with the Advent present imperative 'veni' (come). They stress the eternity of God, in Christ, reaching into salvation history: past, present and future.

### O Sapientia (17<sup>th</sup> December)

O wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the most high, reaching from one end to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: come and teach us the way of prudence (see Eccclus. 24: 1-9).

### O Adonai (18<sup>th</sup> December)

O Adonai, and leader of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: come and redeem us with an outstretched arm (Exod. 3:2; 24: 12)

### O Radix (19<sup>th</sup> December)

O root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you Kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer; come and deliver us, and delay no longer. (Isa. 11: 10)

### O Clavis (20<sup>th</sup> December)

O key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel; you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: come and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death (Isa. 22: 22)

### O Oriens (21<sup>st</sup> December)

O Dayspring, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness: come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death (Mal. 4: 2).

### O Rex Gentium (22<sup>nd</sup> December)

O King of the Nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay (Isa. 28: 16)."

### O Emmanuel (23<sup>rd</sup> December)

O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their saviour: come and save us, O Lord our God (Isa. 7: 14).

*'Life is not hurrying on to a receding future, or hankering after an imagined past. It is the turning aside like Moses to the miracle of the lit bush, to a brightness that seems as transitory as your youth once, but is the eternity that awaits you'* (R. S. Thomas, 'The Bright Field')

## References

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