



# Archbishop Shelton's Pastoral Reflections

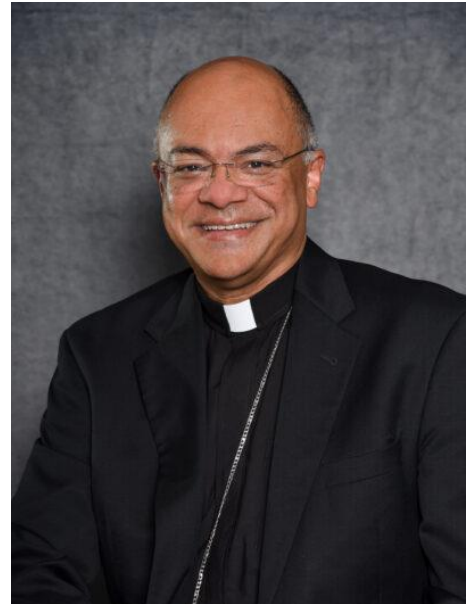
December 1, 2023

## **The Lord is both here with us now and coming again in glory.**

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Advent is a penitential season that calls for prayer and fasting to help us prepare for the joy of Christmas. But there is nothing somber or gloomy about Advent. This is a time of vibrant, joy-filled expectation.

As if to underscore this joyful aspect of the Advent season, every year on the Third Sunday of Advent we celebrate Gaudete Sunday. The Latin word *gaudete* means “rejoice.” In his letter to the Philippians (4:4-5), St. Paul tells us to rejoice always because the Lord is near. Christians should always be filled with joy, but we rejoice in a special way during Advent because of our increased awareness of the Lord’s nearness.



Christ lived among us 2,000 years ago. After His passion, death, and resurrection, He ascended to His Father. But we Christians believe that He will come again in glory on the last day. We also believe that He is with us here and now—in the Holy Eucharist and all the sacraments, in our prayer, in the works we perform in His name, and wherever two or more are gathered as His Church.

Jesus Christ is the Lord of history. This means that while He is the goal or end of human history, He is not bound by the limits of time or space as we are. As a result, He can be present with us now and at the same time, be coming again in the future.

Advent celebrates this mystery. Although we know that Christ is with us always, we still wait in joyful hope for His coming again in glory. While we believe in His Real Presence in the Eucharist, we long for the more perfect communion that we will enjoy when we are with Him in our heavenly home.

This “perfect communion” that is still yet to come is hinted at in the sights, sounds, and smells of Christmas. The season of Christmas is the time of year when we rejoice at the coming of the Lord. We sing of His presence, and we celebrate the wondrous fact that God is with us (Emmanuel), the Lord of history freely choosing to enter our time and space in order to be one with us.

Christmas celebrates this great mystery. God is with us—really and truly—in the person of an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The Almighty God has emptied Himself, as St. Paul says, and taken the form of the most vulnerable and dependent human being, a little child (cf. Phil 2:6–11).

So, we rejoice. We are filled with joy because the long-awaited Savior has come at last. We rejoice because we are not alone in a vast, uncaring universe. God is with us. He knows us—each one by name—and He loves us as His sisters and brothers in the one family of God.


But even as we rejoice at the mystery of God’s presence here and now, we also celebrate the profound hope that He will come again. We believe that the suffering and evil that we continue to experience in this world will pass away one day. God’s kingdom will come—on earth as it is heaven—and on that day every tear will be wiped away, and we will see God face-to-face.

We rejoice that God has joined us to himself by a bond that cannot be broken. There is a great comfort in the closeness of our Emmanuel, our God-with-us always. Christmas invites us to remember all that the Incarnation offers to us in faith and challenges us to proclaim our faith in our words and actions. So, enjoy the holy days of Advent and Christmas!

My prayer for you and for all the people of our Archdiocese is that you will be filled with Advent hope and you will experience all the joys of the coming Christmas season. Now, with the whole Church, we proclaim: *Maranatha!* Come, Lord Jesus!

And in the weeks ahead, we will sing with joyful hearts: *Adeste fidelis!* God is with us. Come, let us adore Him!

Sincerely in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shelton J. Fabre". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre  
Archbishop of Louisville

# What is Advent?

Sunday, December 3, 2023 - Sunday, December 24, 2023

Beginning the Church's liturgical year, Advent (from, "ad-venire" in Latin or "to come to") is the season encompassing the four Sundays (and weekdays) leading up to the celebration of [Christmas](#).

The Advent season is a time of preparation that directs our hearts and minds to Christ's second coming at the end of time and to the anniversary of Our Lord's birth on Christmas. From the earliest days of the Church, people have been fascinated by Jesus' promise to come back. But the scripture readings during Advent tell us not to waste our time with predictions. Advent is not about speculation. Our Advent readings call us to be alert and ready, not weighted down and distracted by the cares of this world (Lk 21:34-36). Like Lent, the liturgical color for Advent is purple since both are seasons that prepare us for great feast days. Advent also includes an element of penance in the sense of preparing, quieting, and disciplining our hearts for the full joy of Christmas.

As we prepare for Christmas, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* notes some differences to the Mass that should be observed during the season. For instance, the priest wears violet or purple during Advent, except for the Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday) when rose may be worn (GIRM, no. 346). Aside from what the priest wears, other aesthetic changes in the Church can include a more modestly decorated altar.

The final days of Advent, from December 17 to December 24, we focus on our preparation for the celebrations of the Nativity of our Lord at Christmas. In particular, the "O" Antiphons are sung during this period and have been by the Church since at least the eighth century. They are a magnificent theology that uses ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming of Christ as the fulfillment not only of Old Testament hopes, but of present ones as well.

Advent devotions including the Advent wreath, remind us of the meaning of the season. Our Advent calendar (linked below) can help you fully enter into the season with daily activity and prayer suggestions to prepare you spiritually for the birth of Jesus Christ.

[2023 Daily Advent Calendar](#)

## A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

(A selection from the Holy Father's Angelus Message on Sunday, December 4, 2022)

The Gospel presents the figure of John the Baptist. The text says that John “wore a garment of camel’s hair”, that “his food was locusts and wild honey” (Mt 3:4), and that he invited everyone to conversion: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”! (v. 2). He preached the nearness of the Kingdom. In short, he was an austere and radical man, who at first sight might appear somewhat harsh and could instill a certain fear. But then again, we can ask ourselves why does the Church propose him each year as our primary traveling companion during this Season of Advent? What is hidden behind his severity, behind his apparent harshness? What is John’s secret? What is the message the Church gives us today with John?



In reality, the Baptist, more than being a harsh man, was a man who was allergic to duplicity. Listen well to this: allergic to duplicity. For example, when the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were known for their hypocrisy, approached him, his “allergic reaction” was very strong! In fact, some of them probably went to him out of curiosity or opportunism because John had become quite popular. These Pharisees and Sadducees were content with themselves and, faced with the Baptist’s sharp appeal, they justified themselves by saying: “We have Abraham as our father” (v. 9). Thus, due to duplicity and presumption, they did not welcome the moment of grace, the opportunity to begin a new life. They were closed in the presumption of being right. So, John says to them: “Bear fruit that befits repentance!” (v. 8). This is a cry of love, like the cry of a father who sees his son ruining himself and tells him: “Don’t throw your life away”! In essence, dear brothers and sisters, hypocrisy is the greatest danger because it can ruin even the most sacred realities. Hypocrisy is a serious danger. This is why the Baptist — as Jesus would be later — was harsh with hypocrites. We can read, for example, chapter 23 of Matthew, in which Jesus speaks so strongly to the hypocrites of that time. And why do the Baptist and Jesus do this? To shake them up. Instead, those who felt they were sinners “went out to him [John], and they were baptized by him, confessing their sins” (cf. v. 5). Therefore, prowess is not important to welcome God, but rather humility. This is the path to welcome God. Not prowess: “We are strong, We are great people...”! No. Humility. “I am a sinner”. But not in an abstract way, no — “because of this and this and this”. Each of us has to confess our

own sins, our own failings, our own hypocrisy, firstly to ourselves. We have to get off the pedestal and immerse ourselves in the water of repentance.

Dear brothers and sisters, with his “allergic reactions” John makes us reflect. Are we not at times a bit like those Pharisees? Perhaps we look at others from top to bottom, thinking that we are better than them, that we have our lives under control, that we do not need God or the Church, or our brothers or sisters, every day. We forget that it is legitimate to look down on someone else only in one case: when it is necessary to help them get up. This is the only case. The others are not legitimate. Advent is a time of grace to take off our masks — each one of us has them — and line up with those who are humble, to be liberated from the presumption of believing we are self-sufficient, to go to confess our sins, the hidden ones, and to welcome God’s pardon, to ask forgiveness from those we offended. This is how to begin a new life. There is only one way, the way of humility — to purify ourselves from the sense of superiority, from formalism and hypocrisy, to see others as our brothers and sisters, sinners like ourselves, and to see Jesus as the Savior who comes for us, not for others, for us, just as we are, with our poverty, misery and failings, above all with our need to be raised up, forgiven and saved.

And let us remember another thing: with Jesus, there is always the possibility of beginning again. It is never too late. There is always the possibility to begin again. Take courage. He is close to us, and this is a time of conversion. Each of us can think: “I have this situation inside, this problem that I am ashamed of...”. But Jesus is beside you. Begin again. There is always the possibility of taking a step forward. He is waiting for us and never grows tired of us. He never tires! And we are annoying, but he never grows tired! Let us listen to John the Baptist’s appeal to return to God. And let us not let this Advent go by like days on the calendar because this is a time of grace, a grace for us too, here and now! May Mary, the humble servant of the Lord, help us to meet him, and our brothers and sisters on the way of humility, which is the only one that will help us go ahead.

## **My Prayer for You**

Please join me in praying this Advent prayer:

*Loving Father, God of Love,*

*Your Son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us.*

*He is a sign of your love.*

*Help us walk in that love during the weeks of Advent,*

*As we wait and prepare for his coming again at Christmas.*

*We make this prayer in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

+ Shelton Fabre