National Bulletin on Liturgy

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Advent
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Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Challenge of Advent</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past, Present, Future</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting for Incarnation</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Liturgies of Advent: An Overview</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Sunday</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts Used Throughout Advent</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekdays I</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Sunday</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Sunday</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekdays II</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Sunday</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekdays III</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Jewish Reaction to Advent</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preaching at Roman Catholic Funerals: Homilies and Eulogies</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preaching at Roman Catholic Funerals: Model and Practice</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship and Culture in Contemporary Lutheran Thought</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hymnals</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Collect</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Challenge of Advent

It is not easy to celebrate Advent well — that is, in full harmony with the liturgies of the Church.

The secular Christmas season, which begins sometime in November and ends on Christmas Day, overlaps with our liturgical season of Advent, and we cannot help but be influenced by it. Instead of waiting for Christmas and then extending its celebration afterwards, as the liturgy does, the secular world anticipates Christmas and celebrates it in the weeks leading up to the feast itself. Christmas Day is a climax to a long period of celebration, and in some ways can become something of an anticlimax.

Values: The secular Christmas season is characterized strongly by commercialism — the need of merchants to sell and to persuade people to purchase their wares. Some businesses do 30 to 50 percent of their annual sales during this season. This must be a terrible strain on owners, managers and staff, and illustrates the unhealthy state of our economic system. In addition, the Christmas season has its own body of music and stories, which dominate the media. Then there are parties, special concerts, and school activities. Even those who keep Advent still need to shop for their Christmas presents, clean and decorate their homes, and prepare for special Christmas meals.

The good side: Not all of the values of the secular Christmas season are bad, of course. This way of celebrating Christmas is significant and meaningful for the many members of our society who have no religious faith, for those who were brought up as Christians but no longer practise their faith, and for the many Christians who do not share our traditional liturgical approach to the celebration of Christmas. Generosity and concern for others is expressed in charitable giving and the exchange of gifts. In addition, celebration and festivity in a cold and hurting world, and the fostering of hope, joy and the healing of relationships are not to be disregarded.

Other faiths: The secular Christmas season can also be a time of misunderstanding and stress for Jews, Muslims and members of other religious faiths. They also cannot totally ignore secular Christmas, and because of its great influence in our society, adherents of other faiths may find it offensive. Most unfortunately, they are quite likely to think that secular Christmas is the Advent and Christmas of Christian faith — which it is not.

Length and structure: Advent still presents challenges for those of us who take it seriously, even if we successfully put aside or disregard the influence of the secular Christmas season. For one thing, Advent is not very long — less than four weeks; in addition, its length varies from year to year. We hardly get into Advent when it is over. Furthermore, the focus of the several Sundays and groups of weekdays seems to keep changing — from the Second Coming of Christ to John the Baptist to Mary; Advent is highly structured and includes a definite progression of thought and experience. It may be difficult to observe these changes of focus and still maintain the unity of this liturgical season.
Other feasts: Advent is also interrupted by two important feasts of Mary: Immaculate Conception (December 8) and Our Lady of Gualalupe (December 12). For some, the feasts of St. Nicholas (December 6) and St. Lucy (December 13) are also important.

The Scripture readings: The liturgy of the word has a distinctive character during Advent. The first reading, from the Hebrew Scriptures, is more prominent than is often the case at other times. The book of Isaiah becomes especially prominent, and much of it is read almost straight through. The interrelationships among the readings are not always easy to discern, and these vary as the season progresses. As befits a season in which we look forward to Christmas, Jesus is not as prominent in the readings as we are used to him being. Questions arise regarding the nature of biblical prophecy and regarding the relationship of the Church to the Jewish people.

Waiting: Advent is supposed to be a season of waiting, anticipation and preparation, but this is a kind of activity – and attitude – that some are not used to or comfortable with. We are more used to “doing things” and “instant gratification” than looking forward in a spirit of contemplation. Those women who are pregnant or who have experienced pregnancy undoubtedly have much to teach the Church in this regard.

Time: The celebration of Advent is strongly associated with a sense of time and in particular with a sense of the future. Considering past, present and future and their interrelationships represents a major challenge.

The liturgical season of Advent is very rich and has much to offer us – and to our world today. This season is worth studying and contemplating, and this issue of the Bulletin is intended to help us to do so.

Other articles concern the difficult ministry of preaching at funerals and another perspective on liturgy and culture.

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Selected Reading

Previous issues of the *National Bulletin on Liturgy:*
Advent and Christmas, no. 36 (1972)
Advent Unlimited, no. 41 (1973)
Advent-Christmas, no. 55 (1976)
Advent in our Home, no. 85 (1982)
“The Advent Wreath,” in no. 134 (1993), 188-190

The standard commentaries on the liturgical year and on the liturgical readings are always helpful.

Of particularly great value:

Other resources:

132
Raymond E. Brown, "The Annunciation to Joseph (Matthew 1.18-25)" Worship 61 (November 1987) 482-493


Raymond E. Brown, "The Annunciation to Zechariah, the Birth of the Baptist, and the Benedictus (Luke 1.5-25, 57-80)," Worship 62 (November 1988) 482-497


Eltin Griffin, ed. Celebrating the Season of Advent (Dublin: Columba Press, 1986)


Emeric Lawrence, Jesus Present and Coming: Daily Meditations on the Advent and Christmas Masses (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982)

Lawrence Madden, "John the Baptist: Image of Advent," Modern Liturgy 17 (December 1990/January 1991) 6-7


Carroll Stuhlmueller, Biblical Meditations for Advent and the Christmas Season (New York: Paulist Press, 1980)
Past, Present, Future

Time: The contemporary liturgical reform and renewal is associated with a new appreciation of time and its expression in liturgical celebration. There is a greater attempt than before to balance the three dimensions of past, present and future. In addition, there is a new appreciation of the relationships among these three dimensions.

Past

Anamnesis: A central category of thought, when considering the relationship of our eucharistic celebrations and the Last Supper of Jesus, is that of memorial. And because the English word memorial is weak and not entirely adequate compared to its biblical roots, the Greek anamnesis or the Hebrew zikkaron are often used instead. We do not go from the present into the past and think of our eucharistic liturgies as reenactments or mere rememberings of the Last Supper. Instead, in our celebrations we liturgically bring the past into the present in order that we can enter into the past event ourselves. We bring the meaning and experience of the Last Supper (and entire paschal mystery) into the realm of our own experience. This is an ancient biblical appreciation of liturgical celebration, still enacted today, for example, in the Jewish liturgy of Passover.

Recently rediscovered: Scholars are still discussing the concept of anamnesis/zikkaron and trying to understand it in even greater depth. Though this biblical concept was only rediscovered in our own times after having been forgotten for a long time, it has had a major impact on our understanding and experience of liturgy.

Future

Memorial acclamation: The second development has been a recovery of the sense of the future in the liturgy. We are perhaps most conscious of this in the last line of the memorial acclamations we sing at the eucharist:

• Christ will come again.
• Lord Jesus, come in glory.
• ... until you come in glory.

Twofold coming: In addition to thinking of the future in terms of life after death and heaven, the liturgy now explicitly includes the expectation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This is especially prominent in the season of Advent.
In the sacramentary, for example, the subtitle for the first preface of Advent is "The two comings of Christ"; that of the second Advent preface is "waiting for the two comings of Christ."

**Ancient and medieval writers** quoted in the Office of Readings describe the meaning of the several comings of Christ in different ways. For example:

> There is a birth of God before the ages, and a birth from a virgin at the fullness of time. There is a hidden coming, like that of rain on fleece, and a coming before all eyes, still in the future. At the first coming he was wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger. At his second coming he will be clothed in light as in a garment.

> Cyril of Jerusalem
> Office of Readings, Sunday 1

We know that there are three comings of the Lord. The third lies between the other two. It is invisible, while the other two are visible. In the first coming he was seen on earth, dwelling among us . . . . In the final coming ‘all flesh will see the salvation of our God’ and ‘they will look on him whom they have pierced.’ The intermediate coming is a hidden one; in it only the elect see the Lord within their own selves, and they are saved.

In his first coming our Lord came in our flesh and in our weakness; in this middle coming he comes in spirit and in power; in the final coming he will be seen in glory and majesty. Because this coming lies between the other two, it is like a road on which we travel from the first coming to the last. In the first, Christ was our redemption; in the last, he will appear as our life; in this middle coming, he is our rest and consolation.

> Bernard of Clairvaux
> Office of Readings, Wednesday 1

**In time and before time:** In addition, individual liturgical texts envision an even broader time scale:

- Before time began, you shared life with the Father.  
  Intercessions, Evening prayer 1, Sunday 1

- You created the world and all who live in it.  
  Intercessions, Evening prayer 1, Sunday 1

- O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain . . . .  
  O Antiphon (Canticle of Mary), Evening prayer, December 18

**The Church:** In our own time, Vatican Council II spoke of a future dimension in the life of the Church. The following excerpt is offered in the Office of Readings.

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus and in which we acquire holiness through the grace of God, will reach its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when the time comes for the renewal of all things, and the whole world, which is intimately bound
up with man and reaches its perfection through him, will, along with the human race, be perfectly restored in Christ.

Lifted above the earth, Christ drew all things to himself. Rising from the dead, he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples, and through the Spirit established his Body, which is the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation. Seated at the right hand of the Father, he works unceasingly in the world, to draw men into the Church and through it to join them more closely to himself, nourishing them with his own body and blood, and so making them share in his life of glory.

The promised renewal that we look for has already begun in Christ. It is continued in the mission of the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit it goes on developing in the Church: there we are taught by faith about the meaning also of our life on earth as we bring to fulfillment – with hope in the blessings that are to come – the work that has been entrusted to us in the world by the Father, and so work out our salvation.

The end of the ages is already with us. The renewal of the world has been established and cannot be revoked. In our era it is in a true sense anticipated: the Church on earth is already sealed by genuine, if imperfect, holiness. Yet, until a new heaven and a new earth are built as the dwelling place of justice, the pilgrim Church, in its sacraments and institutions belonging to this world of time, bears the likeness of this passing world. It lives in the midst of a creation still groaning and in travail as it waits for the sons of God to be revealed in glory.

Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Church, no. 48
Office of Readings, Tuesday 2

**Historical events:** In times past, Christians have strongly emphasized the past historical dimensions of Christ's coming and its liturgical celebration in Christmas. Indeed, we have placed such stress on the past historical dimension of Christ's entire ministry that its future dimension has been seriously minimized.

**Complete fulfillment:** Today – in every liturgy but especially in the season of Advent – we are challenged to see that Christ needs to return in order to complete God's promised dream for humanity and all of creation. We know that though this expectation was vigorous during the earliest period of the Church, it soon faded. Christ's return did not happen as quickly as hoped for, and so Christ's future coming was, for all practical purposes, set aside. Many today likewise are tired of waiting, feel no sense of urgency, do not think much about it, or feel that it is entirely "unrealistic." And yet the future coming of Christ is held up by the Church in the season of Advent as a major emphasis.

**Redemption and violence:** Christians have expressed their belief in and devotion to Jesus Christ by calling him the Saviour who in his life, death and resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit, has brought the fullness of redemption, peace and justice. For Christians there is a way in which this is quite true. Yet, at the level of human experience, we see violence, war, injustice, starvation, and poverty everyday – just think of the "killing fields" of
Cambodia and the “ethnic cleansing” of the former Yugoslavia. How are such experiences to be squared with the fullness of redemption and realm of justice and peace brought by Christ 2000 years ago?

In heaven: At least at the practical and popular level, Christians have tended to dodge this issue, or simply to think of the full experience of justice and peace in terms of heaven.

Already but not yet: Theologians have thought carefully about this question, and speak about it in terms of paradox. We believe that Christ has brought redemption and God’s realm, but that this has not yet reached its full form and is still developing. Our definitive encounter with God has not yet taken place; our face-to-face meeting is still in the future. Theologians use expressions such as “already but not yet” to speak of our in-between situation. The liturgy of Advent stresses the presence, here and now, of what is expected at the end of time. This is our faith. We live now in view of a future when God's plan is perfectly fulfilled and Christ returns to be with us directly.

The Present

Our lives: To focus on the two comings of Christ is to emphasize past and future – but what about the present? In part, we can say that through the principle and practice of anamnesis/zikkaron/memorial we bring the past into the present in every liturgy. We can also say that the future is already present, though not fully. We can live and work toward the future by living lives of justice and peace.

The prayers: It is important to note that the prayers of the liturgies of Advent (collects, prefaces, etc.) are very much in the present – they consistently refer to “us.” These prayers, which will be examined below, speak to us directly about our lives now.

Our story: In addition, we need to remember that the scripture readings are always about us, and not mere history lessons. Because of our former tendency to emphasize history in relation to Advent and Christmas, it is helpful today to stress that the prophetic readings – as well as those from the Christian Scriptures – are for us. Indeed, they need to be heard and appreciated as being about us, being our story, our song. We need to find our place in the story they proclaim – without of course ignoring their original hearers, or the fact that the Jewish people today still listen to Isaiah's message also.

Like Mary: A lovely example is provided in the Office of Readings; we are invited to identify with Mary.

In a way, every Christian is also believed to be a bride of God's Word, a mother of Christ, his daughter and sister, at once virginal and fruitful. These words are used in a universal sense of the Church, in a special sense of Mary, in a particular sense of the individual Christian. They are used by God's Wisdom in person, the Word of the Father. This is why Scripture says, "I will dwell in the inheritance of the Lord." The Lord's inheritance is, in a general
sense, the Church; in a special sense, Mary; in an individual sense, the Christian. Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb. He dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church's faith. He will dwell for ever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul.

Isaac of Stella
Office of Readings, Saturday 2

Proper liturgical methodology leads us to appreciate that when the readings refer to sin, infidelity, darkness, the absence of God, and God's anger and punishment, this is always in the context of faith, goodness, light, and God's presence, love and grace as well. The principle of "already but not yet" applies to all our readings.

About us: Furthermore, both types of passages – sin and fidelity, God's absence and presence – are to be interpreted in terms of ourselves, our society, our Church, our world today. The liturgical readings, again, are our story and for our edification.

Baptism and Eucharist

Our lives in the present are also blessed by participation in the sacraments; here we may think especially of baptism and eucharist.

Baptism: Our principal biblical image of baptism is that of death, burial and rising again based on the sixth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. For the Eastern churches, the story of the baptism of Jesus by John is of greater importance. Our Advent liturgies speak a great deal about John and his own baptismal ministry, which eventually included baptizing Jesus. We need to remember the place of John's baptism of repentance in the gospel story, and the importance to Jesus himself of John's preaching of conversion and justice. John, of course, based his preaching on Isaiah's vision of God's plan of salvation and called people back to this vision. All this applies to us as well, and should be at least in the back of our minds when we experience or think about baptism.

Giving life: Baptism is a call to be prophetic and to point to Jesus; in this we are to be like John. Baptism is also like a new birth, and like Mary we are called to give life to others. In baptism we are given the name of Christ, and at least by implication we bear also the many names that are given to Christ in the liturgies of Advent. In baptism we are joined to Christ "already but not yet."

Eucharist: In Advent the last line of the memorial acclamation, "Christ will come again," becomes especially important, and sensitizes us to its significance at every eucharist. As we gather for eucharist we are reminded of the call of Isaiah and of John: "Prepare the way of God," "every nation shall gather" and "there shall be no more war." We build a community which is the Body of Christ – "already but not yet."

God's dream: In the liturgy of the word we hear and appropriate the stories of God's dream for us in all its many facets and nuances. We are called to dream
and to embrace God's dream and live it out. In the eucharistic prayer we look back into history, bring that into the present of our own experience, and look forward to the fullness of God's plan. We go forth to live out that dream as best we can. We encounter, experience and celebrate Christ in the multiple modes of his presence, but look forward to seeing him face to face in the future, when the fulfillment of God's realm is fully realized.

Justice and Peace

**Our contribution:** In this period of "already but not yet" between Christ's first and second comings, we are called to contribute to the building of a world characterized by justice and peace - without imagining that we can do this without God or that we can compel Christ to come again; that will always be God's surprise.

**God's plan:** Advent, as a season of waiting, anticipation and preparation, and a season in which we focus on the two comings of Christ, provides guidance to our lives here and now. The prophetic readings used in our liturgies - mostly from Isaiah - proclaim God's dream for humanity and all of creation. This is a message of unity among nations and peoples, of peace, justice and wholeness. In his preaching, John the Baptist calls all to return to this dream and to live lives of justice. The following are just a few relevant passages taken from the Sunday readings; others are present in the weekday liturgies as well.

- ... they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.
  Sunday 1A, First reading

- I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.
  Sunday 1C, First reading

- ... with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.
  Sunday 2A, First reading

- Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.
  Sunday 2A, Psalm

- For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory." For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you.
  Sunday 2C, First reading

- Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped ... and the ransomed of the Lord shall return.
  Sunday 3A, First reading
• It is the Lord who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free.

Sunday 3A, Psalm

• ... he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Sunday 3B, First reading

• Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise. Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you. ... Do not extort money from anyone by threats of false accusation.

Sunday 3C, Gospel

Our own dream: We are called to embrace God's message of justice and peace and make it our own. We are called to preach this message ourselves, wherever we are, and to do what we can to make this holy future a present reality – while accepting that we are still waiting.

Mary and her song also provide inspiration for living lives of justice and peace. She showed her openness and fidelity to God’s dream and call; this would include the message of the prophets as well as the message of the angel. Mary's song – the Magnificat – is itself a prophetic proclamation: God "has scattered the proud ... brought down the powerful from their throne ... lifted up the lowly ... filled the hungry ... and sent the rich away empty" (Gospel for December 22).

Hannah's song: Mary's song echoes the earlier song of Hannah, used as responsory on December 22: "The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. The Lord ... raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes."

The liturgies of Advent inspire and guide us in lives of peace and justice. And of course this is a year-round commitment, not limited to a single season.
Waiting for Incarnation

Joseph Bernardin

If waiting, anticipation and preparation are the keynotes of Advent, we need to be clear what – who – we are waiting for. Especially with respect to the first coming of Christ, we need to see beyond the “birthday of Jesus”; how do we appropriate and personally enter into the Christmas event?

In a recent address to the National Federation of Priests’ Councils of the United States, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago spoke of the incarnation, its meaning for the daily lives of all Christians, and its significance for the ministry of priests.¹ This seems highly relevant to the present discussion of the season of Advent.

The doctrine that stands at the heart of the Christian experience and possesses the greatest transformative power, of course, is that of the incarnation. What does it mean for someone to be grasped by this dogma? To live in the energy of the incarnation is to know that real union with God, in the depth of our humanity, is not simply a hope or a wild dream, but a concrete possibility. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, shows that the human being is made for God and finds rest only in God. More to the point, Jesus reveals that God wants nothing more than to come to life in us, to become incarnate in our words and action, in our thoughts, fears and insecurities.

The incarnation means that nothing of our humanity is alien to God or untouched by divine power: birth, coming of age, rejection, triumph, friendship, betrayal, anxiety, bliss, the frightful darkness of death – all of our human experience becomes in principle a route of access to the divine. Because of the coming together of the divine and the human in Jesus, we have the courage to explore a new and deeper identity, one rooted not in the petty desires and fears of oneself, but in the eternal power and existence of God.

My point here is that the language of incarnation is not meant simply to describe a strange and distant event, to speak a truth concerning Jesus alone. Rather, I echo the great medieval mystic Meister Eckhart in saying that if the Word does not come to birth in us today, it is of little value to read about the incarnation of that Word in a person long ago. If, in short, we ourselves do not participate in who Jesus was, we miss the spiritual power he meant to unleash.

If John’s Gospel is any indication, Jesus does not want mere worshippers but, rather, participants: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing” (John 15.5). “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.”

The beautifully organic images that John presents are meant to communicate the life-changing power of the incarnation: The Logos became flesh, our flesh, so that the divine energy might come to birth in us. Much of this is summed up in the oft-repeated patristic adage that God became human so that humans might become God. Many of our greatest theologians and spiritual masters speak unselfconsciously of "divinization" that is to say, a sharing in the symbiosis which is the incarnation.

Cardinal Bernardin now begins to speak of how the incarnation enters into the ministry of priests.

Having taken the doctrine of the incarnation off the academic shelf, we can see how it functions as a healing balm at the disposal of the doctor of the soul. The incarnation is the "salve" applied to those who have lost their center, their existential bearings, their identity. We all have the tendency to cling to ourselves out of fear and thus to root our lives in the desires and impulses of the self rather than in the infinite reality who is God. In sin, we refuse to let go and surrender to the bearing power of the divine, convinced that we will find meaning and focus in reliance upon our own resources. In many ways this sinful attitude is characteristic of our time and manifests itself in the terribly widespread feeling of rootlessness, meaninglessness, anxiety and despair.

What the doctor of the soul can bring to this sickness is something that no psychologist or physician can bring. What the priest can offer is the good news and power of the incarnation. He can hold out to the sufferer the possibility of participating in the God who wants nothing more than to embrace the human condition. The priest can invite the one in anxiety or despair to root his or her life, not in self, but in eternity, in the transcendent ground of meaning – that is, in God. The doctor of the soul can offer the body and blood, the life, of Jesus. Again, this is not primarily a matter of accepting doctrines intellectually; rather it involves a sharing in a power of transformation. The priest as doctor of the soul applies the salve of divinization that heals the deep inner wounds of egotism.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2} Here, a description of the priest. [Ed.]}\]
The Liturgies of Advent: An Overview

Official documents and liturgical books give the following introductions to Advent and its liturgies.

General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar

Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.

Advent begins with evening prayer I of the Sunday falling on or closest to 30 November and ends before evening prayer I of Christmas.

The weekdays from 17 December to 24 December inclusive serve to prepare more directly for the Lord's birth.

Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass

Sundays: Each gospel reading has a distinctive theme: the Lord's coming at the end of time (First Sunday of Advent), John the Baptist (Second and Third Sundays), and the events that prepared immediately for the Lord's birth (Fourth Sunday).

The Old Testament readings are prophecies about the Messiah and the messianic age, especially from Isaiah.

The readings from an apostle serve as exhortations and as proclamations, in keeping with the different themes of Advent.

Weekdays: There are two series of readings: one to be used from the beginning of Advent until December 16; the other from December 17 to 24.

In the first part of Advent there are readings from Isaiah, distributed in accord with the sequence of the book itself and including salient texts that are also read on the Sundays. For the choice of the weekday gospel the first reading has been taken into consideration.

On Thursday of the second week the readings of the gospel about John the Baptist begin. The first reading is either a continuation of Isaiah or a text chosen in view of the gospel.
In the last week before Christmas the events that immediately prepared for the Lord’s birth are presented from Matthew (Chapter 1) and Luke (Chapter 1). The texts in the first reading, chosen in view of the gospel reading, are from different Old Testament books and include important Messianic prophecies.

Sunday Celebrations of the Word and Hours

Advent has a twofold character. It is the season to prepare for Christmas, when Christ's first coming is remembered, and it is the 'season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. For these two reasons, the season of Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.'

This twofold character is reflected in the two stages of Advent, each with its own special focus. From the first Sunday to 16 December, the liturgy expresses the eschatological expectation of Advent, the watchfulness of God's people looking forward to the time when Christ will come 'again in glorious majesty,' and 'we shall at last possess in its fullness the promise for which we dare to hope.' From 17 December until Christmas Eve, the texts proper to each day prepare us more directly to celebrate the Lord's birth, 'our hearts filled with wonder and praise.'

Advent is not simply a preparation to commemorate the historical event of Christmas nor primarily an expectation of the parousia, but is rather an anticipation or a beginning of the celebration of the integral mystery of the incarnation, the advent and the epiphany of the Son of God in flesh and in majesty. The Christian community lives in an 'interim' time between two historical events: the coming of Christ in the flesh and his coming in glory at the end of time. The Church is called to be strong in faith 'as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.'

Structure and Development

The descriptions just given provide a good overview, but because of their brevity they inevitably omit some of the richness, nuances and complexity of the entire body of liturgical texts. In addition, we need to consider not only the lectionary for mass, but also the collects and other liturgical texts of the eucharistic liturgy, the readings, antiphons, responsories and intercessions of the liturgy of the hours, and finally, the Office of Readings.

The weekdays of Advent are organized not in groups of six, following each Sunday, but rather in groups of eight and nine; there are three such groups of weekdays.

The season of Advent of course constitutes a united whole. Based on the lectionary for mass, however, a progression of seven Sundays and groups of weekdays can be distinguished; each makes a special and distinctive contribution to the whole, which will be considered later.
• First Sunday
• Weekdays I (Monday 1 through Wednesday 2)
• Second Sunday
• Third Sunday
• Weekdays II (Thursday 2 through Friday 3)
• Fourth Sunday
• Weekdays III (17-24 December)

Repeated texts: Not all texts follow this progressive development, however. Only one week's readings for the liturgy of the hours are provided, hence they are repeated four times. This is also true for the responsories of the liturgy of the hours, and the entrance and communion antiphons for mass. In addition, only two sets of intercessions for the liturgy of the hours are provided, one set for the first and third weeks, and the other for the second week and December 17-24. These texts, then, form a relatively constant background upon which the development described above is layered.

The Office of Readings again contributes in a distinctive way. Much of chapters 1 to 54 of the prophet Isaiah are read in a semicontinuous manner, together with commentaries from the writers throughout the history of the Church.

The Liturgy of the Word

The scripture readings for mass during the season will be appreciated most fully if
• we accept them as our own story and those of our Church and world;
• we see continuity between the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures used in the liturgy;
• we learn something of how the several readings are interrelated.

Interrelated: The scripture readings are not simply placed side by side, independent of each other. Neither are they chosen so that one always predominates, leaving the others in a position of lesser importance. Though the dynamics of the interrelationships among the readings will be considered in detail below, a brief introduction will be provided here.

Different parts: A helpful image here is that of a musical composition that has several parts. It may be written for a chorus, or several vocal soloists, or a string quartet, or an orchestra. The different parts may sing (or play) back and forth to one another; sometimes one part takes the lead, sometimes another. At times they may complement each other, providing harmony or a rhythmic base line; at other times one part may sing a descant or ornamentation over the main melody; or two melodies may be sung at the same time.

The singers: If we think of a composition with several vocal soloists, we may name them as Isaiah, David (the psalmist), Paul, Jesus, John and Mary; others are in the chorus or have smaller roles.
A repetitive foundation is laid by those liturgical readings and texts that are used week after week for the entire season of Advent, especially the readings for morning and evening prayer. Many of these texts keep telling the message of Christ's second coming, so we hear about this even as Christmas draws near. Others refer to the expected birth of Jesus, so we hear this message from the very beginning of the season.

Isaiah: Off in a corner – the Office of Readings – Isaiah sings his message in semicontinuous excerpts from his book (chapters 1-51). In a more prominent voice, Isaiah also sings semicontinuous excerpts on weekdays up to December 16 (chapters 1-56).

Mary begins to sing her song, softly and in the background, from the very beginning of Advent. On the fourth Sunday (years B and C) and on December 20 to 24, however, she takes the lead.

Jesus' own voice is heard on the first Sunday and during the first and second series of weekday liturgies. John is heard on the second and third Sundays.

The great richness of the Advent liturgies, however, is provided by the ways the readings and other texts interact. In general, Isaiah is the "lead singer" or "principal part" during the first three weeks. The other voices, in different ways, respond to or sing back to Isaiah's song: David in the psalm, Jesus and John in the gospels, and Paul in his letters; sometimes Paul responds to the gospel as well. The nature of these responses, however, varies through the season.

During the last part of Advent the dynamic is reversed: the gospel characters – Joseph, Zechariah, Mary, Elizabeth, the messengers of God – take the lead, and various parts of the Hebrew Scriptures respond.

A detailed analysis of the different modes of interaction among the scripture readings is given below.
First Sunday

In coming to appreciate the season of Advent more deeply, it is necessary to immerse oneself in the readings and prayers, to enter into them, make them one's own story and prayer, come to appreciate their depth and riches. It is hoped, therefore, that this and following chapters will be used for meditation and private prayer as well as study. Because the full texts of the readings cannot be given here, copies of the Sunday and weekday lectionaries should be close at hand.

Lectionary for Mass

The basic message concerns God's great dream for humanity and all of creation. This is also Jesus' dream, and he speaks of its complete fulfillment in his own Second Coming.

In terms of internal dynamics, Isaiah (or Jeremiah in year C) first sings about God's dream and plan; different nuances and emphases are given in the individual years of the three-year cycle.

In the gospel passage, Jesus responds - sings back - to the prophetic message. He agrees, affirms, accepts it as his own. He emphasizes certain aspects. He identifies the completion of his mission - his coming again - with the complete fulfillment of the prophet's message. He warns us to wake up and be alert and ready; he appropriates the dream. In referring to himself and his return in relation to the Son of Man, he is influenced by the language and thought of the book of Daniel. Jesus says "yes, it is important, there are consequences."

Paul's message may be understood as a response to both the gospel and the prophet. He too accepts the dream proclaimed by the prophet, he too identifies the coming of the risen Christ with the fulfillment of the prophets' dream, he too emphasizes that the dream and its complete fulfillment have consequences for our daily living.

Both Jesus and Paul affirm, confirm, and apply the message of the prophet. They warn us to be alert, wake up, and live accordingly.

Year A

The prophet gives us several images of God's great dream for humanity. All nations will come together, they will acknowledge the one true God, be taught by God, and walk in God's ways. Among other things, this means the end of war.
Jesus accepts Isaiah's vision of unity and peace; indeed, he takes it for granted. Jesus' concern is that the people of his time—and of our own time—have given up on this vision and no longer feel a sense of urgency regarding it. He therefore tells us that it is going to be a great surprise, and that while some will be ready, others will not be.

Paul also takes Isaiah's proclamation for granted and repeats Jesus' call to be ready: "the night is far gone, the day is near." He then draws practical consequences regarding how we are to live while we wait.

Year B

The prophet proclaims Israel's faith in God as creator and giver of life, and in the close relationship that exists between God and Israel: like parent and child. He then names the actual lives of individuals and societies in terms of sin, inequity and uncleanness, and interprets this situation in terms of God's absence and anger. But of course God is not totally absent or angry. These thoughts lead to a heartfelt plea for the complete and full presence of God.

Jesus accepts that God will come in fullness as envisioned by the prophet and the psalmist. When this will happen, however, no one knows. Therefore we must "keep alert" and "keep awake"; we should not be asleep when God comes.

Paul thanks God for our "fellowship" with Christ Jesus, a relationship that fills us with spiritual gifts. At the same time, we are to "wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Year C

The prophet speaks of the messianic times but also of the person of the messiah. "The days are surely coming" when God's promise will be fulfilled, when relationships among individuals and peoples will be characterized by justice, righteousness and safety. God's agent is called "a righteous Branch," and is also named "The Lord is our righteousness."

Jesus speaks of his return in terms of seeing "the Son of Man coming in a cloud," and warns us to "be alert at all times," praying "for strength."

Paul prays that we may be strong and be blameless before God "at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

Prayers

It cannot be stressed too much how important it is to pray with the liturgical prayers of the sacramentary. The following set of four opening prayers anticipates present plans for the new edition of the sacramentary, to be expected in the next few years. The first collect is a new translation from the Latin; we may refer to it as the "general" opening prayer, which may be used all three years. The other three collects are new, original—and beautiful—compositions in English, one each for year A, B and C of the liturgical cycle; they are related to the readings of the day, but can also be used independently of these readings.
These new versions and compositions have been published in *Sunday Celebrations of the Word and Hours* (Ottawa: CCCB, 1995), and we are very fortunate to have access to them. Of course, at this stage they constitute draft texts; they have not yet received the approval of the episcopal conference and confirmation by Rome for inclusion in the sacramentary.

**The general opening prayer** urges us to live lives of justice and mercy to prepare for Christ’s Second Coming:

Almighty God, strengthen the resolve of your faithful people

to prepare for the coming of your Christ

by works of justice and mercy,

so that when we go forth to meet him

he may call us to sit at his right hand

and possess the kingdom of heaven.

**The new opening prayer for year A** applies the scripture readings to our own lives:

God of majesty and power,

amid the clamour of our violence

your word of truth resounds;

upon a world made dark by sin

the Sun of Justice casts his dawning.

Keep your household watchful

and aware of the hour in which we live.

Hasten the advent of that day

when the sounds of war will be for ever stilled,

the darkness of evil scattered,

and all your children gathered into one.

**The new opening prayer for year B** also urges our alertness:

Rend the heavens and come down,

O God of all the ages.

Rouse us from sleep,

deliver us from our heedless ways,

and form us into a watchful people,

that, at the advent of your Son,

he may find us doing what is right,

mindful of all you command.

**The new opening prayer for year C** incorporates emphases from all the readings:

God our Saviour,

you utter a word of promise and hope

and hasten the day of justice and freedom,

yet we live in a world forgetful of your word,

our watchfulness dulled by the cares of life.

Keep us alert.

Make us attentive to your word,

ready to look on your Son

when he comes with power and great glory.

Make us holy and blameless,

ready to stand secure

when the day of his coming shakes the world with terror,

whose day draws near . . .
The first Advent preface (used through December 16) expresses the "already-but not-yet" of this season:

When he humbled himself to come among us as a man, he fulfilled the plan you formed long ago and opened for us the way to salvation. Now we watch for the day, hoping that the salvation promised us will be ours when Christ our Lord will come again in his glory.

Antiphons at morning and evening prayer proclaim the coming of God:

Proclaim the good news among the nations:
Our God will come to save us.
Know that the Lord is coming and with him all his saints;
that day will dawn with a wonderful light, alleluia.
The Lord will come with mighty power;
all mortal eyes shall see him.
The mountains and hills will sing praise to God;
all the trees of the forest will clap their hands, for he is coming,
the Lord of a kingdom that lasts for ever, alleluia.
Rejoice, daughter of Zion; shout for joy, daughter of Jerusalem, alleluia.
I am coming soon, says the Lord;
I will give to everyone the reward his deeds deserve.
See the Lord coming from afar; his splendor fills the earth.

Another antiphon describes the day of God's coming: "On that day sweet wine will flow from the mountains, milk and honey from the hills, alleluia."

One psalm antiphon specifically speaks of Jesus Christ: "Christ our King will come to us: the Lamb of God foretold by John."

In two antiphons we put the angel Gabriel's words on our own lips:

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, Mary; you have no need to be afraid. You will carry in your womb the Son of God, alleluia.
Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God; you will conceive and give birth to a Son, alleluia.

Some of the intercessions speak directly of our desire for Christ's Second Coming; here is a sampling of such texts.

Jesus Christ is the joy and happiness of all who look forward to his coming. Let us call upon him and say: Come, Lord, and do not delay!
In joy, we wait for your coming, come, Lord Jesus.
Before time began, you shared life with the Father, come now and save us.
You created the world and all who live in it, come to redeem the work of your hands.
You did not hesitate to become man, subject to death, come to free us from the power of death.
You came to give us life to the full, come and give us your unending life.
You desire all people to live in love in your kingdom, come and bring together those who long to see you face to face.
Texts Used Throughout Advent

Repeated: Certain liturgical readings and antiphons are repeated one week after another for the entire season of Advent. These include the readings and responsories for morning and evening prayer of the liturgy of the hours, and the entrance and communion antiphons of the eucharistic liturgy for weekdays.

Background: These texts constitute a kind of constant background against and over which the readings for mass, other texts of the liturgy of the hours, and the office of readings progress from the beginning to the completion of this season.

Readings for Morning and Evening Prayer

The readings used at morning prayer and evening prayer for the first week of Advent are repeated for the second week and for Sunday through Friday of the third week; there is no office for Saturday 3. The same readings are then used for December 17-24, though there is no evening prayer for December 24.

Second Coming: The eight readings from the Christian Scriptures used for evening and morning prayer for Sunday, and for evening prayer on the weekdays, all speak of the future fulfillment of God's dream for humanity and creation, and do so in terms of the future coming of the risen Christ.

Sunday

- 1 Thessalonians 5.19-24 (from Sunday 3B). May you be kept safe for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Romans 13.11-14 (from Sunday 1A). You must wake up now.
- Philippians 4.4-7 (from Sunday 3C). The Lord is very near.

Monday: Philippians 3.20b-21. From heaven comes the Savior we are waiting for.

Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 1.4-9 (from Sunday 1B). You are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

Wednesday: 1 Corinthians 4.5. Leave [judgment] until the Lord comes.

Thursday: James 5.7-11 (from Sunday 3A). Be patient until the Lord's coming.

Friday: 2 Peter 3.8b-10 (from Sunday 2B). The Day of the Lord will come like a thief.
First coming: The six passages from the Hebrew Scriptures used for morning prayer on weekdays seem, in the Christian imagination, to resonate with the story of incarnation of the Word made flesh.

Monday: Isaiah 2.3b-4 (from Sunday 1A). He will wield authority over the nations.

Tuesday: Genesis 49.8-10 (from 17 December). The scepter shall not pass from Judah.

Wednesday: Isaiah 7.10-15 (from Sunday 4A). The maiden is with child.

Thursday: Isaiah 45.5-8 (from Wednesday 3). Let the earth open for salvation to spring up.

Friday: Jeremiah 30.21, 22. Their prince will be one of their own.

The weekdays from Monday week 1 through Wednesday week 2 constitute a unit.

Isaiah is read semicontinuously from chapter 2 to chapter 40. Separate readings are given for the first Monday for year A and for years B and C; this is the only time that more than one reading is provided. Gospel readings are taken mostly from Matthew, with two from Luke.

As with the readings for the first Sunday, the prophet Isaiah continues to proclaim God's dream for humanity and creation. Of course this dream was originally enunciated with respect to the future of Israel. Whereas on the First Sunday Jesus' response was affirmation of the prophet's vision, on these weekdays Jesus goes further and says that this vision is coming to fruition – to actuality – in what he is doing and saying. As already considered, the prophet's vision is “already but not yet” in the works and words of Jesus; the dream is fulfilled, but not yet completely so. It is as if Isaiah were reading the gospels to see how they resonate with his message; he picks out certain passages and seems to say, “This sounds like me!”

While there is development, there is also continuity between the message of the Hebrew Scriptures and that of the Christian Scriptures. The prophet's message does not lose its validity or its applicability to our own lives. Rather, it provides the basis, context and broad scope in which to appreciate the ministry of Jesus and what is new about it.

Monday 1

Isaiah says, “Over all the glory there will be a canopy. It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat, and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain. In the gospel the faithfilled centurion says, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. And the servant was healed in that hour.”

The opening prayer:¹

Lord our God,
keep your servants alert and watchful
as we await the return of Christ your Son,
so that when he comes and knocks at the door
he may find us vigilant in prayer,
with songs of praise on our lips.

¹ Opening prayers for weekdays are draft revised translations prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy.
Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

Lift up your eyes, Jerusalem, and see the great power of your King; your Savior comes to set you free.

The angel of the Lord brought God's message to Mary, and she conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, alleluia.

Tuesday 1

Isaiah says, "The spirit of the Lord shall rest on" God's chosen one, "with righteousness he shall judge the poor," and "the wolf shall live with the lamb." In the gospel Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit at what the seventy had accomplished. He tells them, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!"

The opening prayer:

Lord God of mercy, hear our petitions and give us your loving help in our trials, that when your Son comes he may strengthen us by his presence and heal the scars of our former ways.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

From the root of Jesse a flower will blossom, the glory of the Lord will fill the earth, and all creation shall see the saving power of God.

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near, alleluia.

Wednesday 1

Isaiah describes a rich banquet which God will prepare for all peoples on the holy mountain. In the gospel Jesus compassionately feeds a great crowd with "seven loaves and a few small fish."

The opening prayer

By your holy power, Lord God, prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ your Son, that he may find us worthy to sit at his banquet and to receive from his hands the food of eternal life.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

The law will go forth from Zion; the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. The One who is coming after me is greater than I; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals.

Thursday 1

Isaiah says, "Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock." In the gospel Jesus says, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his home on rock."

The opening prayer:

Stir up your power, Lord God, and support us with your mighty strength, that your merciful grace may bring us quickly the salvation that our sins delay.

154
Antiphons for the gospel canticles:
I shall wait for my Lord and Savior and point him out when he is near, alleluia.
Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Friday 1
Isaiah says, “On that day . . . the eyes of the blind shall see.” In the gospel Jesus restores sight to two men who were blind.

The opening prayer:
Stir up your power, Lord God, and come;
protect us from the menace of our sins,
release us from their grasp,
save us, Lord, and set us free.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:
Our God comes, born as man of David’s line, enthroned as king for ever, alleluia.
Out of Egypt I have called my Son; he will come to save his people.

Saturday 1
Isaiah says, “Your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.” In the gospel, “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues.”

The opening prayer
Merciful God, you sent your Son into our world
to free the human race from its age-old bondage;
as we watch for his coming,
lavish your heavenly goodness upon us,
that we may gain the prize of true deliverance.

Antiphon for the morning canticle:
Banish your fears, O people of Zion;
God, your own God, is coming to you, alleluia.

Monday 2
Isaiah says, “Then . . . the lame shall leap like a deer.” In the gospel, Jesus heals “a man who was paralyzed on a bed.”

The opening prayer
Let the prayer of your servants rise before you, O Lord,
that we may come to celebrate the incarnation of your Son
with generous and undivided hearts.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:
The Lord proclaims:
Repent, the kingdom of God is upon you, alleluia.
See, your King comes, the master of the earth;
he will shatter the yoke of our slavery.
Tuesday 2

Isaiah says, “God will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms.” In the gospel, Jesus speaks of the good shepherd who seeks out the one sheep that has gone astray.

The opening prayer:

Lord God,
in Christ your Son you proclaimed salvation
to all the ends of the earth.
Give us grace, we pray,
to prepare joyfully for his glorious birth.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

A voice is heard crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight the path of our God.
Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Zion;
I will come and make my dwelling in you, says the Lord.

Wednesday 2

Isaiah says, “[God] gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.” In the gospel, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

The opening prayer:

You command us, God of power,
to prepare the way for Christ the Lord.
Let our weakness never discourage us,
as we long for his presence
that brings us comfort and healing.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

He will be enthroned in David's place to be king for ever, alleluia.
Zion, you will be renewed, and you will see the Just One who is coming to you.
Second Sunday

The second and third Sundays, and the second set of weekdays (from Thursday week 2 through Friday week 3) all refer to John the Baptist. John is a prophet, one who goes before the Lord to prepare his ways, one who points to Jesus.

John’s birth is closely associated with that of Jesus; John is six months older. The second and third Sundays and related weekdays, however, are not about John’s birth; that is celebrated on December 19, 21, 23 and 24.

Here we have a new time frame: both John and Jesus are about 30 years of age. It is the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, and more related liturgically to the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, celebrated in mid-January, than to Christmas itself.

John may be seen as one who “points” – to God’s dream for humanity and creation as enunciated by Isaiah and other prophets (indeed the entire tradition of Israel); and to Jesus, in whom God’s plan is realized “already but not yet.” John’s ministry as messenger and prophet is in continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures. His message – convert, turn back to God, do justice – is the same as that of the prophets.

The words “Prepare ye” are words spoken 30 years after the births of John and of Jesus; they are words spoken some 700 years before by Isaiah. They are applied in the gospels to the twofold coming of Jesus.

Isaiah continues to be the first singer of the scriptural song. The three readings for years A, B and C give us some of the most wonderful and most familiar images of God’s plan (many especially familiar because of their inclusion in Handel’s “Messiah”). We hear about the wolf living with the lamb, about valleys lifted up and mountains and hills made low, about God leading Israel with joy.

In response we read the first accounts of John’s ministry, as told in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The accounts are similar: John appears in the wilderness, preaches “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” calls people to “convert” or turn back to God, and scolds people who disregard his message – which is the message of the prophets. In addition, he points to “one who is more powerful than I who is coming after me.”

In year A, Paul looks back to the prophets: “Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction.” He also says that Christ intended to “confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.” In year B, the epistle of Peter tells us that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief,” and “while you are waiting . . . strive to be . . . at peace.” In year C, Paul prays “that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”
The general opening prayer for all three years:

Almighty and merciful God,
do not let our earthly concerns
keep us from hastening to meet your Son,
but teach us that heavenly wisdom
which makes us his true companions.

The new opening prayer for year A:

Your kingdom is at hand,
O God of justice and peace;
you made John the Baptist its herald
to announce the coming of your Christ,
who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
Give us a spirit of repentance
to make us worthy of the kingdom.
Let complacency yield to conviction,
that in our day justice will flourish
and conflict give way
to the peace you bestow in Christ.

The new opening prayer for year B:

With tender comfort and transforming power
you come into our midst,
O God of mercy and might.
Make ready a way in the wilderness,
clear a straight path in our hearts,
and form us into a repentant people,
that the advent of your Son
may find us watchful and eager for the glory he reveals.

The new opening prayer for year C:

God of our salvation,
you straighten the winding ways of our hearts
and smooth the paths made rough by sin.
Make our conduct blameless,
keep our hearts watchful in holiness,
and bring to perfection the good you have begun in us.

Some antiphons speak of the coming of God:

New city of Zion, let your heart sing for joy; see how humbly your King comes to save you.

Our God will come with great power to enlighten the eyes of his servants, alleluia.

The Lord will come on the clouds of heaven with great power and might, alleluia.

The Lord will come; he is true to his word.
If he seems to delay, keep watch for him, for he will surely come, alleluia.
The Lord our king and lawgiver will come to save us.
Come to us, Lord, and may your presence be our peace;
with hearts made perfect we shall rejoice in your companionship for ever.

Other antiphons refer to the Lord as already present:
Zion is our mighty citadel, our saving Lord its wall and its defense;
throw open the gates, for our God is here among us, alleluia.
Come to the waters, all you who thirst;
seek the Lord while he can be found, alleluia.

One psalm antiphon contains an explicit reference to Christ: “Have courage,
all of you, lost and fearful; take heart and say: Our God will come to save us,
alleluia. The law was given to Moses, but grace and truth come through Jesus Christ.”

Two antiphons refer to Mary:
I am sending my angel before me to prepare the way for my coming.
Blessed are you, O Virgin Mary, for your great faith; all that the Lord
promised you will come to pass through you, alleluia.

Again, some intercessions pray explicitly for the Second Coming:
To Christ the Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary,
let us pray with joyful hearts: Come, Lord Jesus!
Lord Jesus, in the mystery of your incarnation,
you revealed your glory to the world,
give us new life by your coming.
You redeemed the world from sin by your first coming in humility,
free us from all guilt when you come again in glory.
You live and rule over all,
in your goodness bring us to our eternal inheritance.
You sit at the right hand of the Father,
gladden the souls of the dead with your light.
Third Sunday

The third Sunday of Advent is rather like the second. In years A and B, Isaiah again preaches great visions — and expectations: healing, release from captivity, the year of God's favor. In year C, Zephaniah promises that God "is in your midst." God "will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival."

In response, Matthew and Luke continue to tell about John the Baptist; in year B we read from John's gospel rather than from Mark. In year A Jesus tells John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you see: the blind receive their sight . . . ." Furthermore, he tells the crowds that John is a prophet and more than a prophet. In year B John identifies himself as "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." In year C he preaches about justice, and even tax collectors and soldiers listen to him. John also continues to point to the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

In year A the epistle of James exhorts us to "be patient ... until the coming of the Lord." In year B Paul again prays, "may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In year C, Paul preaches: "The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything."

Prayers

The general opening prayer for all three years:

Gracious God,
your people look forward in hope
to the festival of our Savior's birth.
Give us the strength to reach that happy day of salvation,
and to celebrate it with hearts full of joy.

The new opening prayer for year A:

God of glory and compassion,
at your touch the wilderness blossoms,
broken lives are made whole,
and fearful hearts grow strong in faith.
Open our eyes to your presence
and awaken our hearts to sing your praise.
To all who long for your Son's return
grant perseverance and patience,
that we may announce in word and deed
the good news of the kingdom.

The new opening prayer for year B:

O God, most high and most near,
you send glad tidings to the lowly,
you hide not your face from the poor;
those who dwell in darkness you call into the light.
Take away our blindness,
remove the hardness of our hearts,
and form us into a humble people,
that, at the advent of your Son,
we may recognize him in our midst
and find joy in his saving presence.

The new opening prayer for year C:
Almighty God,
you sent your Son into a world
where the wheat must be winnowed from chaff
and wickedness clings even to what is good.
Let the fire of your Spirit
purge us of greed and deceit,
so that, purified, we may find our peace in you
and you may delight in us.

Some psalm antiphons speak of the Lord’s coming:
Rejoice, Jerusalem, let your joy overflow;
your Savior will come to you, alleluia.
I, the Lord, am coming to save you;
already I am near; soon I will free you from your sins.
The Lord is coming without delay.
He will reveal things kept hidden
and show himself to all mankind, alleluia.
Mountains and hills shall be level, crooked paths straight,
rough ways smooth. Come, Lord, do not delay, alleluia.
Our Lord will come to claim his glorious throne
in the assembly of the princess.
Let the mountains speak out with joy
and the hills with answering gladness,
for the world’s true light, the Lord, comes with power and might.
Let us live in holiness and love as we patiently await our blessed hope,
the coming of our Savior.

Several antiphons refer to John:
When John, in prison, heard of the works of Christ, he sent two of his
disciples with this question: Are you the One whose coming was foretold,
or should we look for another?

Are you the One whose coming was foretold, or should we look for another? Tell John what you see: the blind have their sight restored,
the dead are raised to life, the poor have the good news preached to
them, alleluia.
The weekdays from Thursday week 2 through Friday week 3 constitute a unit; no liturgy is appointed for Saturday week 3.

Again, Isaiah is read semicontinuously, from chapter 41 through chapter 56. In addition there is one reading each from Sirach (Saturday 2), Numbers (Monday 3), and Zephaniah (Tuesday 3). Isaiah continues to proclaim God's dream for Israel and all of humanity.

Whereas in the Sunday readings, John spoke about - pointed to - Jesus, here the relationship is reversed: Jesus speaks about - points to - John. In only one case (Wednesday 3) does John say anything, and there he merely introduces a speech by Jesus. Jesus either says, "Listen to John," or the opposite: "You did not listen to him." It is clear that John could cause divisions; there were believers and those who disbelieved.

John: But (with the one brief exception already noted), John himself does not speak in these passages. He is the prophet, the messenger, the Elijah-forerunner, in continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures. He brings Isaiah's message about God's dream into the present. In these liturgies, the first reading, usually from Isaiah, presents the content of what John says and what we are supposed to listen to - according to Jesus; the prophets' words are put in the mouth of John, at least implicitly.

Thursday 2

Isaiah says, "I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." Jesus says that John "is Elijah who will come. Let anyone with ears listen!"

The opening prayer:

   Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your Son, that his coming may purify our minds and make us worthy of your service.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

   I will help you, says the Lord. I am your Savior, the Holy One of Israel. The one who is coming after me existed before me; I am not worthy to untie his sandals.
Friday 2

Isaiah says, "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you for your own good . . .. O that you had paid attention to my commandments." "Jesus continued to speak to the crowds about John the Baptist . . .. For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, 'He has a demon.'"

The opening prayer:
Almighty God,
keep your people ever vigilant
as they await the return of your Son,
that, mindful of our Savior's teaching,
we may hasten with lamps burning
to greet him when he comes.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:
Say to the fainthearted: Take courage!
The Lord our God is coming to save us.
Rejoicing you shall draw water from the wellspring of the Savior.

Saturday 2

Sirach says, "How glorious you were, Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! You were taken up by a whirlwind of fire." After the transfiguration Jesus says, "Elijah has already come . . .." and "the disciples understood that Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist."

The opening prayer:
Lord God,
let the brilliance of your glory
rise in our hearts like the dawn,
that the darkness of the night may be scattered
and the coming of your Son may reveal us
as children of the light.

Antiphon for the morning canticle:
The Lord will set up his standard in the sight of all the nations,
and gather to himself the dispersed of Israel.

Monday 3

The prophet Balaam says, "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is clear, the oracle of the one who hears the words of God . . .." Jesus asks, "Did the baptism of John come from heaven or was it of human origin?"

The opening prayer:
Open your ears to our cries, Lord God,
and light up the dark places of our hearts
with the grace of your Son,
who shall visit his people and set them free.
Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

From heaven he comes, the Lord and Ruler;
in his hand are honor and royal authority.
All generations will call me blessed:
the Lord has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

Tuesday 3

Zephaniah says, "Ah, soiled, defiled, oppressing city! . . . it has not drawn near to its God." Jesus says, "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him."

The opening prayer:

Lord God,
through your only-begotten Son
you have made us a new creation;
guard carefully the great work of your mercy
and through the coming of your Son
remove all trace of our old ways of sin.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

Arise, arise! Wake from your slumber, Jerusalem;
shake the chain from your neck, captive daughter Zion.
Before Mary and Joseph had come together,
they learned that Mary was with child
by the power of the Holy Spirit, alleluia.

Wednesday 3

Isaiah says, "Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength." In the gospel John's disciples asked Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

The opening prayer:

Grant, almighty God,
that the coming feast of the birth of your Son
may confer healing upon us in this present life
and prepare us for the rewards of the life to come.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

Be comforted, my people;
be comforted, says the Lord your God.
You, O Lord, are the One whose coming was foretold;
we long for you to come and set your people free.

Thursday 3

Isaiah says, "For my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed." The gospel reports, "And all the
people who heard this, including tax collectors, acknowledged the justice of God, because they had been baptized with John’s baptism.”

The opening prayer:

Lord God,
our faults weigh us down
and our sins make us unworthy of you,
but gladden our hearts by the birth of your Son,
for he comes bearing the gift of salvation.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

Arise, arise, Lord;
show us your power and might.
All you who love Jerusalem,
rejoice with her for ever.

Friday 3

Isaiah says, “Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come . . ..” In the gospel Jesus says, “You sent messengers to John the Baptist, and he testified to the truth.”

The opening prayer:

Let your tireless grace accompany us always, Lord God,
let it stretch before us and follow after,
that we who long for the coming of your Son,
may enjoy your protection
in this life and in the life to come.

Antiphons for the gospel canticles:

Guard what is good and cherish what is true,
for our salvation is at hand.
This was the witness of John the Baptist:
The One who comes after me existed before me.
Fourth Sunday

The dynamics of the scriptural proclamation are entirely different for the fourth Sunday of Advent and December 17 to 24 than the rest of the season. In this part of Advent the gospel is the primary speaker from the point of view of dynamics, though it is the last heard in the liturgy.

The gospel stories proclaimed on the fourth Sundays of the three-year cycle are also told on weekdays: The announcement to Joseph (Sunday 4A, December 18), the announcement to Mary (Sunday 4B, December 20) and the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (Sunday 4C, December 21).

The reading from the Hebrew Scriptures then responds, in terms of dynamics, to the gospel story. Where can the Jesus story be recognized in the Hebrew Scriptures? How and where do the Hebrew Scriptures resonate with the gospel story? Moses, the kings and the prophets listen to the gospel story and ask, “Where have we heard something like this before? Where and when did we plant the roots and seeds for what has grown up in the gospels?” There is great continuity between the Hebrew and Christian scriptures here.

This continuity is built into the gospel stories themselves. At least some of the characters depicted are reminiscent of some of the characters of the Hebrew Scriptures. The literary structures used are borrowed, as is much of the language, from the Hebrew Scriptures. The people depicted are pious Jews, living what is referred to as a temple piety. There is a priest, serving in the Temple, and his family; there is circumcision and the Torah. The songs of Mary and of Zechariah are in large part repetitions of songs we already know in the mouths of Hannah, Judith, and others. Indeed, there is something new in the gospel story, but even the novelty is in continuity with what has gone before. On these points readers should consult Raymond E. Brown’s masterful The Birth of the Messiah (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977).

The readings from the epistles are more closely related to Christ’s first coming than to the second. In year A, Paul identifies himself as “set apart for the gospel of God, which God promised beforehand through his prophets...the gospel concerning his Son who was descended from David according to the flesh.” In year B Paul speaks of the mystery “that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed.” In year C the letter to the Hebrews speaks of Christ coming to do God’s will.

Prayers

The general opening prayer for all three years:
Pour forth, O Lord, your grace into our hearts:
once through the message of an angel
you revealed to us the incarnation of Christ your Son;
now through his passion and cross
lead us to the glory of his resurrection.
The new opening prayer for year A:

Eternal God,
in the psalms of David,
in the words of the prophets,
in the dream of Joseph
your promise is spoken.
At last, in the womb of the Virgin Mary,
your Word takes flesh.
Teach us to welcome Jesus, the promised Emmanuel,
and to preach the good news of his coming,
that every age may know him
as the source of redemption and grace.

The new opening prayer for year B:

Here in our midst, O God of mystery,
you disclose the secret hidden for countless ages.
For you we wait; for you we listen.
Upon hearing your voice
may we, like Mary, embrace your will
and become a dwelling fit for your Word.

The new opening prayer for year C:

Who are we, Lord God,
that you should come to us?
Yet you have visited your people
and redeemed us in your Son.
As we prepare to celebrate his birth,
make our hearts leap for joy at the sound of your Word,
and move us by your Spirit to bless your wonderful works.

The second Advent preface, to be used on the fourth Sunday and from December 17 on is subtitled "Waiting for the two comings of Christ."

His future coming was proclaimed by all the prophets.
The virgin mother bore him in her womb
with love beyond all telling.
John the Baptist was his herald
and made him known when at last he came.
In his love Christ has filled us with joy
as we prepare to celebrate his birth,
so that when he comes he may find us watching in prayer,
our hearts filled with wonder and praise.

Antiphons proclaim the good news:

He comes, the desire of all human hearts;
his dwelling place shall be resplendent with glory, alleluia.
Come, Lord, do not delay;
free your people from their sinfulness.
The fullness of time has come upon us at last:
God sends his Son into the world.
Sound the trumpets in Zion, the day of the Lord is near;
he comes to save us, alleluia.
The Lord is here; go out to meet him, saying,
Great his birth, eternal his kingdom, strong God,
Ruler of all, Prince of peace, alleluia.
Your all-powerful Word, O Lord,
will come to earth from his throne of glory, alleluia.
See how glorious he is,
coming forth as Savior of all peoples!
Crooked paths will be straightened,
and rough ways made smooth.
Come, O Lord, do not delay, alleluia.
Ever wider will his kingdom spread,
 eternally at peace, alleluia.

New Hymnals

The United Church of Canada has recently published its new hymnal, *Voices United: The Hymn and Worship Book of The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House 1996). It is to be congratulated for this fine resource, which includes 974 items and excellent indices. Additional liturgical resources will be published in due course.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (and its corresponding church in the U.S.) have a new music and liturgy supplement to *Lutheran Book of Worship*, which was published in 1978. It is called *With One Voice: A Lutheran Resource for Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1995), and it includes new musical settings for the eucharistic liturgy and service music, and several hundred new hymns and songs.

The Anglican Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada currently are also working on new hymnals, which hopefully will be published in the next few years.
Weekdays III  
(December 17-24)

O Antiphons

A very special feature of the liturgies for these days are the antiphons for the canticle of Mary at evening prayer; these are also printed in the weekday lectionary as optional gospel acclamations. Because in the original Latin and traditional English translations they all begin with “O” they are called the O Antiphons. Two translations are given here: a more traditional version used in the liturgy of the hours, and a more modern version, beginning with “Come,” used in the weekday lectionary. Note that the newer version often replaces “your people” and similar terms with “us.” In addition, some of the modern versions are more paraphrases than translations. They are worthy of our prayer and meditation as a group.

December 17

O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care.  
Come and show your people the way to salvation.

Come,  
Wisdom of our God Most High,  
guiding creation with power and love:  
teach us to walk in the path of knowledge!

December 18

O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.

Come,  
Leader of ancient Israel,  
giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:  
rescue us with your mighty power!

December 19

O Flower of Jesse’s stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; the nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.

Come,  
Flower of Jesse’s stem,  
sign of God’s love for all his people:  
save us without delay!
December 20

O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel controlling at your will the gate of heaven: come break down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death; and lead your captive people into freedom.

Come, Key of David,
opening the gates of God's eternal kingdom:
free the prisoners of darkness!

December 21


Come, Emmanuel,
God's presence among us, our King, our Judge:
save us, Lord our God!

December 22

O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; O Keystone of the mighty arch of man, come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.

Come, King of all the nations,
source of your Church's unity and faith:
save all people, your own creation.

December 23

O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Savior of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God.

Come, Emmanuel,
God's presence among us, our King, our Judge:
save us, Lord our God!

The Weekday Readings and Prayers

December 17

Matthew gives his version of Jesus' ancestry, which begins with Abraham and includes Jacob and Judah and, later, David, among many others. Jesus is born of Mary, and is called the Messiah – the Christ. Four women are included as well: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.
Jacob predicts the future of his descendants, says that “the scepter shall not depart from Judah . . .” and speaks of tribute and obedience. In Israel the anointed one – the Christ – is the king, and in the Christian imagination this royal image is applied to Jesus.

The opening prayer:

Creator and redeemer of the human race,
whose will it was
that your Word should take flesh
in the womb of the ever Virgin Mary,
grant that your Son,
who has shared in our human nature,
may lead us to share in his divine life.

December 18

An angel of God tells Joseph that Mary’s pregnancy is of the Holy Spirit. By adopting Jesus, he becomes a son of David. At the end of the story, Matthew refers to Isaiah 7, naming a virgin’s son Emmanuel. Jeremiah speaks of God raising up a “righteous Branch” who is a descendant of David. There is also a reference to the new exodus of the return from exile; hence the image of Moses is alluded to as well.

The opening prayer:

All-powerful God,
we are oppressed and weighed down
by the ancient yoke of sin.
Grant that the birth of your only Son,
so long awaited yet for ever new,
may deliver us and set us free.

December 19

The daily lectionary begins to use Luke’s gospel.

The story of the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist is told. The angel speaks of Zechariah and predicts that Elizabeth will become pregnant. John is described as a Nazarite, and Zechariah is made mute.

The wondrous birth of the Hebrew Scriptures’ most prominent Nazarite, Samson, is described. Again, there is an annunciation to the father, the prediction of pregnancy, some description of the child’s future mission, and the statement that the child will be filled with the spirit of God.

The opening prayer:

God of life,
you revealed your glory to the world
through the birth of Christ to a virgin mother.
Grant that we may celebrate
with full and reverent faith
this great mystery of the Word made flesh.
December 20

The second annunciation story in Luke’s gospel – namely that to Mary (also Sunday 4B). The reading from Isaiah includes the passage quoted by Matthew on December 18, applied now as a pre-echo of Luke’s version of the annunciation of the wondrous conception of Jesus. Certainly Mary is described as a virgin.

The opening prayer:

Lord,
by consenting to the message of an angel
the Virgin Mary became the dwelling of your eternal Word
and was filled with the light of the Holy Spirit.
Give us the grace to follow her example
and submit ourselves humbly to your holy will.

December 21

The story of the visitation is told next. Elizabeth greets Mary with a blessing and John leaps in the womb. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and praises Mary for her faith and fidelity. The prophet Zephaniah sings of daughter Zion, who sings, rejoices and exults. The Christian imagination sees in the words “The king of Israel, the Lord, your God, is in your midst” an allusion to Mary’s pregnancy. And God rejoices, too.

Exceptionally, an alternative reading is also proposed, from the Song of Songs. The key words are at the beginning: “The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes . . .”.

The opening prayer:

Merciful Lord,
hear the prayers of your people,
who celebrate the coming of your Son in the flesh,
that when he comes again in glory
we may rejoice in the prize of eternal life.

December 22

The story of the visitation concludes with the singing of the Magnificat by Mary; for the purposes of the lectionary the story has been divided into two. Mary sings her response to Elizabeth’s greeting and her response to God’s mighty act in her.

The reading and canticle, from 1 Samuel, constitute a single unit. It tells of the wondrous pregnancy of Hannah, and her song, which from a literary point of view has been a basis for Mary’s song.

The opening prayer:

All-provident God,
when we were sunk in sin and death
you turned toward us
and rescued us by the coming of your only son.
Grant that we who worship the child of Bethlehem
may come to know him as our Redeemer.

December 23

Elizabeth gives birth to a son, he is circumcised and given the name John. Zechariah regains his speech, and the neighbours wonder about John. The prophet Malachi speaks of a messenger, one like the prophet Elijah, who will go before God, who is coming soon.

The opening prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God,
as the feast of the incarnation draws near,
we humbly ask mercy of your Word,
who took flesh of the Virgin Mary
and came to dwell among us.

December 24

The second part of the story of John's birth is told here, namely Zechariah's song, the Benedictus - his response to the birth of John and the fulfillment of the angel's annunciation. John is referred to as the prophet of the Most High, one who will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.

The words of the prophet Nathan to king David, regarding the future of his line, were a literary inspiration for the words of Gabriel when he announced the forthcoming birth of John to Zechariah (the story told on December 19).

The opening prayer:

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay!
We entrust ourselves to your love:
strengthen us by your advent and raise us up.

Antiphons refer to the impending birth of Jesus:

Bethlehem in Judah's land, how glorious your future!
The king who will rule my people comes from you.
Lift up your heads and see;
your redemption is now at hand.
The day has come at last
when Mary will bring forth her firstborn Son.
The time has come for Mary
to give birth to her firstborn Son.

The responsory likewise looks forward to Jesus' birth.

Tomorrow will be the day of your salvation,
the sinfullness of earth will be destroyed.
The Savior of the world will be our king.
A Jewish Reaction to Advent

Margaret Moers Wenig

The contemporary Roman Catholic liturgy for Advent shows great continuity between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures, and is not antagonistic to Judaism. This, however, was not always true in the past, and the Advent liturgy sometimes was interpreted in a very anti-Jewish manner. Unfortunately, this past antagonism is still present in some Advent songs. Note, for example, the difference between the versions of the O Antiphon "O come, Emmanuel" used in our present liturgies (printed above) and that found in the popular song, "Come, O come, Emmanuel"; we no longer speak of "captive Israel," for example.

The subject of the relationships between Christianity and Judaism past and present is much studied today, and while difficult, considerable progress is being made. Both the Vatican Council II and recent popes have dealt with the matter in very constructive ways — but it remains far from settled. A useful introduction to this subject is M.B. McGarry's Christology after Auschwitz (New York: Paulist Press 1977).

That our Advent songs — and perhaps leftover modes of interpretation of the Advent liturgies — still present difficulties to our Jewish friends and neighbors is shown in the following sermon, preached during Advent 1994 at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. It is good for us to hear the consequences — often unintended — of our liturgical celebrations.

Rabbi Wenig teaches liturgy and preaching at Hebrew Union College — Jewish School of Religion in New York City, and is rabbi of Temple Beth Am.

I am a Jew. But for many years I have been a guest at Advent services. Every year I am moved, but also disturbed. Let me tell you why.

The answer lies in the following story. A true story. A story which began in Buchenwald.

Buchenwald was a camp for so-called political prisoners, Austrian Jews transferred from Dachau, Jews rounded up in mass arrests on Kristallnacht, Polish, Russian, Hungarian Jews whom the Nazis evacuated from other camps as the Soviet army approached. In the eight years the camp operated, it held 238,000 prisoners of whom "only" 56,000 died.

At the end of the war, American troops arrived to liberate the camp. From Buchenwald the inmates were transferred to DP camps. In one, a small group of Buchenwald survivors dreamed of settling in Palestine and establishing a kibbutz. Just three years later, during a short ceasefire in Israel's war of...
independence, the kibbutz was founded. Today it flourishes with intensive farming, three industries and the birth of a third generation.

The name of the kibbutz? Netzer – a branch or shoot.

“A shoot shall grow from the stump of Jesse, Netzer, a branch, shall sprout from its roots.”

Kibbutz Netzer: a small green shoot sprouting from the stump of a lofty old tree.

This story comes to my mind every year when I listen to my colleagues and friends singing, “Come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel.” Every year I think of Kibbutz Netzer as I listen to Isaiah’s promise of restoration to Israel, read during Advent as if to suggest that Israel’s restoration awaits the advent of Jesus.

Come, O come Emmanuel
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appears.

And that disturbs me.

You see, to Jews, Isaiah’s promise of restoration speaks not only of the advent of the messiah at the end of time, but also of our recurring experience of redemption throughout time. We are commanded to celebrate Passover, every year, as if we too came out of Egypt.

Part of Isaiah’s promise has already been fulfilled, time and again whenever the Jewish people has been felled and new shoots have miraculously appeared:

• At the time of Cyrus the exiles were restored to Jerusalem (as Isaiah predicted);
• After the Romans exiled us from Jerusalem again, seeds of Jewish life and learning spouted in new towns;
• After the equally devastating expulsion from Spain, 150,000 Jews planted new roots in Amsterdam, Constantinople, Cairo and the Americas;
• And today, only 50 years after Hitler attempted to make all of Europe Judenrein (free of Jews), tiny shoots of European Jewish life push through the rubble towards the sun.

Come, O come Emmanuel, ransom captive Israel?

Jews are not awaiting the advent of a savior, Jesus, to ransom us. God taught us long ago to ransom captives ourselves: According to the Talmud pidyon shevuyim, the ransoming of captives is a commandment of paramount importance. In the Middle Ages, Jews had many opportunities to fulfill it but never in the numbers we have known in our own era: 50,000 Jews rescued from Yemen between 1948 and 1949; 120,000 Jews from Iraq two years later; 14,000 Jews from Ethiopia in 1984, ransomed for 35 million dollars!

No, we are not waiting for a savior to ransom captive Israel. We are not waiting for a new shoot to appear.
But we are still waiting and working for righteousness to reign. For the wolf does not yet lie down with the lamb; nor is it yet safe for a child to play over the hole of an asp or even in a city park. People still die of poverty and plague and the earth is filled with violence as waters cover the sea. We try to heal the sick and bring an end to war; and sometimes we succeed. But when we fail, because of our hard hearts or despite our best efforts – when we fail and lofty old trees or promising young ones are ruthlessly hacked down with an axe, then sometimes God shows us a sign.

The rebirth of the Jewish people, like the rebirth of the Church in Soviet lands, is a testimony to human will and a testimony to God's will, God's will for all people. It is as if God does not want despair to overwhelm us. It is as if God does not want death to have the final word. And so God shows us: from the stumps of many a fallen tree, tiny green shoots sprout with new life.

The Collect

It is common (and entirely correct) to describe the collect form of prayer (as, for example, in the opening prayer of the eucharistic liturgy) as consisting of four parts:

- an invitation by the presider for all to pray;
- a period of silence in which all do indeed enter into prayer;
- a spoken prayer by the presider which in some way "collects" or raises up the previous silent prayers of the assembly;
- a spoken "Amen" by the rest of the assembly, signifying that the presider's spoken prayer did indeed resonate with their silent prayer.

A rare, but equally correct description is found in the Rite of Penance, Appendix II, n. 25a.

Then he [the presider] invites all to pray. After a period of silence, he concludes the prayer in this way:

(a prayer to be spoken is printed).

This holds the silent prayer of the people and the subsequent spoken prayer of the presider in closer relationship than is usual: the people's prayer and the presider's prayers are one, and the latter is a conclusion to the former. This is a good way of looking at the collect form, and honors the period of silent prayer well: without a good beginning (the people's prayers), the presider's conclusion makes little sense.
Dr. Leo Klug teaches at Newman Theological College, Edmonton. Claire Dowbiggin made this topic the subject of her Master of Theological Studies thesis at St. Stephen's College, Edmonton.

The Catholic funeral rites of the pre-Vatican II Canadian church remained essentially unchanged since they were issued following the Council of Trent in the Roman Ritual of 1614. As regards preaching at pre-Vatican II funerals, practices varied from no preaching at all, to sermons on the unpredictability of death, often with a hellfire and brimstone flavour.

Vatican Council II called for a revision of Catholic funeral practices, emphasizing the restoration of their paschal flavour. The 1970 Rite of Funerals marked a theological paradigm shift in the understanding of Catholic funeral rites, including preaching. The Rite contains some helpful comments on what funeral homilies should be. The Order of Christian Funerals, promulgated by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1990, marks a further and significant development in Roman Catholic funeral practices, with a heavy emphasis on the Word of God.

The following quotation is an example:

A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the gospel reading at the funeral liturgy and may also be given after the readings at the vigil service; but there is never to be a eulogy. Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should dwell on God's compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand that the mystery of God's love and the mystery of Jesus' victorious death and

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resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. Through the homily, members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God. Lay persons who preside at the funeral rites give an instruction on the readings. At the practical level, anecdotal evidence suggests that very different approaches to funeral preaching are being taken in Canadian Roman Catholic parishes. One concern frequently expressed is that many preachers are giving eulogies instead of homilies. If pressed for clarification, at least four distinct issues arise:

- homilies are a form of preaching that focuses on the scriptures, not on the deceased;
- eulogies are a form of preaching that focuses on the deceased, especially the person's accomplishments;
- eulogies are forbidden at Catholic funerals;
- many Catholics appear to prefer the eulogies to the homilies they hear at funerals.

This article will first survey the research that has been undertaken on preaching to see what is being done and how people respond to this. Then we will consider the vexed question of homilies and eulogies, their definitions and practical expressions. In the following article we will consider several specific models of a funeral homily. Finally, we will summarize a recent research project undertaken to study preaching at Roman Catholic funerals.

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**Research on Preaching**

Some empirical research has been done on the subject of preaching at Catholic worship services in general. Most of this work has focused on the reactions listeners have to the preaching they hear, and overall, the reactions have been negative. Andrew Greeley contends that only one-fifth of Catholics are pleased with the preaching they hear in their parishes, and the proportion falls to ten percent among younger Catholics. In his words:

> The terrible state of the homily is an affront to those lay people who have to be at their very best in their own professional fields merely to survive. They are appalled that priests earn their salaries and enjoy their security even though they are miserable preachers.⁶

Research by James Brieg came to similar conclusions about how Catholics felt about their preachers. Recent polls and studies of Catholics have

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⁵ *Order of Christian Funerals* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1990), n. 27
⁶ Andrew Greeley, "Priests Should Make Preaching Their Number One Job," *U.S. Catholic* (December 1983) 13
discovered a general dislike for Catholic preaching; one survey concluded that sermons were one of the three main reasons people left the Church.\(^7\) Patrick Collins summarizes his impressions of what Catholics think about preaching:

> But, while many priests and deacons may enjoy their own homilies, the laity do not generally experience the same satisfaction. They find homilies are frequently more didactic than inspiring, more statements of doctrine than reflections on life-enlightened-by-faith.\(^8\)

Given the importance assigned to preaching in Catholic worship, it is surprising that so little empirical research has been done on the topic. What is even more surprising is the discovery that almost no research has been done on funeral preaching. Our review of the literature produced no references to published empirical research on Catholic funeral preaching.

### Homilies and Eulogies

It is necessary at this point to provide a brief discussion of different kinds of funeral preaching and to clarify two basic terms: homily and eulogy.

A homily is a form of preaching, and like all preaching, is directed at stirring up the faith. But a homily is also a very special kind of preaching; in the words of the Second Vatican Council, it is “a part of the liturgy itself.”\(^9\) As the U.S. Catholic bishops put it,

> The very meaning and function of the homily is determined by its relation to the liturgical action of which it is a part. It flows from the Scriptures which are read at that liturgical celebration, or, more broadly, from the Scriptures which undergird its prayers and action, and it enables the congregation to participate in the celebration with faith.\(^10\)

A homily presupposes faith; its main concern is not with a systematic explication of theology. The liturgical assembly is not primarily an educational setting. Rather, the homily is preached in order that a community of believers who have gathered to celebrate the liturgy may do so more deeply and more fully.\(^11\) As Robert Waznak puts it, “the homily is an interpretive rather than an instructional event,” and “the liturgical homily strives not simply to inform but to transform.”\(^12\) James Wallace notes that in canon law and in some early documents following the Second Vatican Council, the common understanding of a homily was focused on instruction. He takes issue with this approach,

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\(^7\) James Brieg, “What U.S. Catholics Think About Sermons,” *U.S. Catholic* (November 1983) 6-18


\(^9\) Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n. 52


\(^11\) Ibid.

\(^12\) Robert P. Waznak, “The Homily Fulfilled in Our Hearing,” *Worship* 55 (January 1991) 31
seeing it as too limited.\footnote{James A. Wallace, "Guidelines for Preaching by the Laity: Another Step Backward?" \textit{America} (September 1989) 139} He sides with the position the American bishops took in their understanding of the liturgical homily:

A scriptural interpretation of human existence which enables a community to recognize God’s active presence, to respond to that presence in faith through liturgical word and gesture, and beyond the liturgical assembly, through a life lived in conformity with the Gospel.\footnote{Fullfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1982) 29} It is more than interesting to note that the American Catholic bishops stated that the first place to look, when trying to understand the homily, is to the community gathered for worship. A homily cannot “happen” except in the context of a given worshipping community. Hence the homily acts as a bridge between the faithful and their God. It is more than biblical exegesis, and serves to interpret the lives of the people gathered for worship. The situation requires that the “homilist stand in solidarity with the people he is called to serve.”\footnote{James A. Field, “Order of Christian Funerals: This Is a Pastoral and Liturgical Treasure,” \textit{Today's Parish} (March 1990) 30} In an excellent article on liturgical preaching, Edward Schmidt contends that one must distinguish between knowledge and news. The liturgical homily is clearly the latter more than the former. “The homilist is not just a herald, but also a witness to the truth of that which is announced.”\footnote{Edward W. Schmidt, “Another Look at Christian Preaching,” \textit{Worship} 55 (September 1981) 434} Hence a given funeral homily is to be closely tied to a given liturgical celebration of a given faith community marking the death of one of its members, at a given point in time. The role of the homily is to interpret the life of the community and the life of the deceased in such a way that the assembly recognizes how God has been and still is present in their lives, leading to praise and thanksgiving. William Cieslak laments the practice of preachers using a “generic homily” for funerals, changing only demographic details and using it over and over again.\footnote{William Cieslak, \textit{Console One Another: Commentary on the Order of Christian Funerals} (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1990) 133-134} He also notes that funeral homilies often turn out to be merely discourses on death, incapable of really nourishing the faith of a community mourning the death of one of its members. He then states,

For this particular group of hearers to receive strength and consolation from the word of God, the homilist, it would seem, has to incorporate something about the deceased in the homily. If the deceased was deeply loved, why should the hearers be hopeful? How can they be consoled? What does the word of God have to say about the deceased’s death? If the deceased was a child, the hearers might want to know why God allows such things to happen to the innocent. All will seek to ‘make sense’ out of this moment as best they can. The difference between a eulogy and a homily incorporating references to the deceased is difficult to name. Perhaps it is the focus: a eulogy focuses on the deceased; a homily focuses on the
church’s story told because of the death of the deceased and in light of the deceased’s faith.18

The literal meaning of the word eulogy is praise. To eulogize is to praise, most commonly to praise a recently deceased person. In a stricter sense, a eulogy consists of listing the positive qualities and accomplishments of the deceased, ostensibly to edify and deepen the faith and hope of the assembly. An article by Luis Roniger provides some fascinating insights into the composition of the eulogy in the Jewish tradition:

The publication of eulogies and lamentations delivered at funerals in praise of the deeds and memories of prominent individuals was an established custom by the late 18th century, both among Jews and members of other faiths. In both cases, publication honoured the memory of the deceased and his/her work. At the same time, these eulogies were intended to withstand the passage of time as literary pieces in their own right, and as didactic masterpieces of moral edification.19

In many parts of Canada, among people of various faith traditions, the word eulogy is commonly used in a less strict sense. It is used to refer to the preaching that takes place at a funeral, whatever form that preaching takes. Hence some eulogies could be very similar to some homilies, depending on how one wishes to define the terms. In a recently published funeral handbook the author, an experienced Christian minister, provided several sample “eulogies” which are, in fact, similar to many funeral “homilies” or “sermons” one hears.20 A well-known funeral manual makes a distinction between funeral sermons that do not contain a eulogy and those that do contain a eulogy, noting that in a eulogy one “only speaks well of the deceased, often in flattering terms.”21

Many Catholics use the term eulogy to refer to that kind of funeral preaching in which personal references are made to the deceased. Hence, for them a funeral “homily” containing personal references to the dead person becomes a “eulogy.” In a recent publication, Frank Henderson notes:

Some presiders and preachers seem to think that the prohibition against eulogies means that they cannot or should not say anything personal about the deceased in the homily – or at other appropriate occasions in the funeral liturgy. This view is quite mistaken; personal references are not prohibited at all. Indeed, a failure to make some personal references to the deceased goes against the intent of the funeral homily.22

Another use of the term eulogy that is common among Canadian Catholics is in reference to words of remembrance, which are often offered by a member

18 Ibid., 133
of the deceased's family at some point in the funeral rites. In the United States, words of remembrance are permitted during the funeral vigil and during the church service, while in Canada they are permitted at the vigil only (though they are often used in the church service!).

Though these words of remembrance will undoubtedly speak of the deceased in a positive way, and may perhaps be laudatory, they are not the eulogy that is prohibited at Catholic funerals. Again, we should avoid using the term "eulogy" for this part of the vigil service and instead use a more precise and descriptive term such as "remembrance" or "words of remembrance."23

Terence Curley makes the point that personal references to the deceased during a funeral are part of a healing ritual, and reflect proper pastoral care of those who mourn.24 Jack Bloom advocates a similar approach.25

It is clear, therefore, that the Catholic prohibition of funeral eulogies does not refer to preaching that includes personal references to the deceased, but to eulogies in a much stricter sense. It appears that the problem with the traditional, "strict-sense eulogies" is the theology which underlies them. As Flor McCarthy notes, "However much we might wish to stress the good the deceased has done, we must be careful lest we convey the impression that eternal life can and must be earned by our own efforts. Eternal life is a gift, always a gift."26 He goes on to make a very telling point: "People are frightened, rather than encouraged, by the idea of eternal life which must be won by our own efforts."27

Reginald Fuller expresses similar concerns about the "theological perils" inherent in giving funeral eulogies, and notes: "It is all too easy to represent a person's personal achievements and personal merits, rather than as the fruit of grace, and so to land himself into anticipating the last judgement, and to forget the apostolic injunction 'Judge nothing before the time.'"28 Robert Hovda issues a similar caveat when he notes:

A culture which has many virtues but which also tends to worship wealth and to grace its members accordingly expresses its values in death customs as elsewhere. At times these so overshadow the faith expression of the funeral liturgy -- counter-cultural as the following of Jesus always is -- that a funeral becomes a witness to materialism rather than to the faith values of prayer, reverence, honesty, simplicity, and community.29

Another way of reflecting on the problem of the funeral eulogy is to recall that the Order of Christian Funerals does indeed stress the importance of praise and thanksgiving. However, the emphasis is on praising and thanking God for the gift of the deceased, more than the deceased's accomplishments. This

23 Ibid., 250
24 Terence P. Curley, Console One Another (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1993) 45
25 Jack Bloom, "The Eulogy as a Tool in Grief Work," Pastoral Psychology (December 1970) 38
27 Ibid.
29 Robert W. Hovda, "The Amen Corner," Worship 59 (May 1985) 251
type of "praise preaching" is both legitimate and theologically sound. However, in Richard Rutherford's commentary on the Order, he cautions the preacher to read such directives correctly, and notes:

This offers the homilist an opportunity to take the circumstances of the specific funeral into account. Unfortunately, still too many seem to read this directive as an excuse to deliver a secular eulogy with a veneer of Christian virtue. . . . too many faithful Catholics who expect and deserve what the Rite promises, are frustrated by the canned funeral eulogy that *mutatis mutandis* can apply to anyone or by biographical sketches that hardly reflect Christian faith.\(^3^0\)

To reiterate, the Catholic concern about funeral eulogies is primarily a theological concern. The Christian eschatology in which the Order of Christian Funerals is rooted is at the heart of the Christian message. Rutherford laments the fact that often paschal faith is confused with superficial, death-denying glee. The message of the Christian funeral is to proclaim, above all else, reconciliation and salvation through the paschal mystery, not via the virtues and accomplishments of the deceased. In John Meier's excellent critique of Catholic funerals, offered from the perspective of sacred scripture, a similar concern is expressed:

It is insipid and insensitive to speak only of joy and triumph when the mourners in the pews are trying to grapple with the real mysteries of pain, suffering, and sometimes tragedy. Especially in the case of a suicide or the death of a young person, the liturgy should not gloss over the palpable tragedy, the apparent meaninglessness of the event.\(^3^1\)

The confusion between what is meant by a funeral homily and a funeral eulogy is partly a result of how such terms are defined. Clearly, both terms are assigned a broad range of meanings. In his article entitled "Preaching at Funerals: Homily or Eulogy?" Thomas Sieg reiterates many of the points made above. For him, the essential criteria for differentiating between a homily and a eulogy are these questions:

- On whom does this sermon focus?
- By the end of the sermon does the congregation have a clearer vision of God, or a clearer vision of the deceased person?
- Has the sermon focused on what God has done?
- Are people moved by the sermon to give praise to the person who has died?\(^3^2\)

To conclude these brief comments on the meaning of funeral homilies and eulogies, it is critically important to realize that a Catholic funeral is a liturgical event. It is, first and foremost, an ecclesiastical liturgical celebration. It is liturgical worship that is special, and it is special because it is "sparked" by the death of a unique human being. The death of a unique person requires funeral preaching that is unique and tailor-made for the occasion.

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\(^{32}\) Thomas H. Sieg, "Preaching at Funerals: Homily or Eulogy?" *The Priest* (January 1984) 42

183
Preaching at Roman Catholic Funerals: Model and Practice

Leo Klug and Claire Dowbiggin

In order to carry out research on the actual practice of preaching at Roman Catholic funerals, it is first necessary to enunciate clearly a model of the key elements of a good funeral homily. This can then be used as a benchmark for analysis of what is actually taking place.

A Model for Analyzing Funeral Homilies

Official church documents do not provide complete and systematic models of what a funeral homily should be. Several unofficial articulations have been proposed, some more thorough than others. Lawrence Frankovich describes a general approach, built on three foci:

- God's activity through Christ
- the deceased person's life
- the feelings of the bereaved.¹

William Richard proposes a dynamic, seven-phase model, but his theory is basically a series of excerpts from various church statements, mainly Fulfilled In Your Hearing by the American bishops.² John Melloh provides a thorough discussion of funeral preaching, and suggests that Burke's five-stage process for understanding the dynamics of human relations (act, scene, agent, agency and purpose) could be of great help in preparing funeral homilies.³

Robert Krieg has proposed a detailed and systematic model of funeral preaching involving five stages and rooted in two basic principles.⁴

- The first principle is theological and holds that the quest for God and the quest for self are in fact one reality.

³ John Allyn Melloh, "Homily or Eulogy? The Dilemma of Funeral Preaching," Worship 67 (November 1993) 502-506
• The second principle is liturgical, and holds that funeral preaching is a dialectic wherein the paschal mystery, on the one hand, and the experiences of the deceased and the assembly, on the other hand, are held in tension.

Krieg ties these principles together by appealing to Karl Rahner’s theology of grace. In Krieg’s words:

The aim of the funeral homily is to proclaim the mystery of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ, as this is attested to in the liturgical texts and also in the life of the deceased. To accomplish this the homily is shaped by a dialectic between stories from the Bible and stories about the individual being buried.

This statement of the purpose and character of the funeral homily flows from the two currents of thought ... The theological anthropology of Rahner sheds light on the relationship of unity and difference between God and humankind. To the extent that a person attains his or her unique maturity in solidarity with the human community, the individual gives glory to God. Thus to recall fragments of a person’s life is to say something directly about the individual’s response to God and also indirectly about the nature of God’s invitation, as experienced by this individual. To paraphrase Rahner, talk about human life is, when properly done, talk about God.5

Krieg’s model of a funeral homily consists of five distinct, though related, phases or stages.

Phase one: The opening in which the preacher empathizes with the next of kin, and the deceased’s final days are recalled.

Phase two: The preacher articulates the pain and other feelings present in the hearts and minds of the assembly.

Phase three: Enunciating the sense of the scriptures proclaimed at the funeral, relating and contrasting this with the sentiments of the assembly and with the paschal mystery.

Phase four: The preacher presents a verbal portrait of the deceased, focusing on a unifying theme in that person’s life-response to God.

Phase five: Finally, the preacher reiterates the thrust of the message: To stand in wonder and gratitude at God’s ways, and to honour the deceased.6

Research Methodology

It seemed clear to us that Krieg’s model of a funeral homily was the most complete and most theoretically sound approach to this type of preaching. It also lent itself best to empirical research. Hence, a series of questions was formulated in a checklist questionnaire which could be used to determine the degree to which a given funeral homily conformed to the Krieg model. From four to ten questions were constructed for each of the five phases of the model. Each

5 Ibid., 232
6 Ibid., 233-234
question reflected a different and distinct aspect of the content required for each phase. In this way a given homily could be assigned a high, medium or low score. Revisions to some of the questions were made after a preliminary test.

During a four-month period in 1994, the preaching at 24 Roman Catholicfunerals was audiotaped and transcribed; all of the funerals were in different parishes, with different preachers, in a large Canadian city. All identifying names of persons and places were eliminated from the working transcriptions in order to preserve confidentiality and to control research bias. The deceased for whom the 24 funerals were celebrated ranged in age from young children to elderly people. The size of the assemblies present at the funerals ranged from 30 to 500 people.7

Research Findings

Using the research checklist made up of 34 separate questions reflecting the Krieg model, the typed transcriptions of the 24 funeral homilies were evaluated by the two researchers. All of the 34 questions had the same 0-3 response categories. A score of zero would mean that the required content of that aspect of the Krieg model was absent, while a score of three would mean that the required content was fully present. Each of Krieg's five phases was given a score, and the summation of the five scores would produce a final score for a given homily.

Phase one of Krieg's model calls for the homilist to deal with seven distinct issues around the themes of empathy, the deceased's last days, and recalling God's ways. The highest score that can be given to phase one is 21. When all 24 of the homilies were evaluated, the scores on phase one ranged from zero to 16. Two of the 24 homilies were ranked high, 8 were ranked medium, and 14 were ranked low. Most of the homilies that scored medium to high reflected some attempts to extend empathy and to honour the deceased. The other key issues called for in the first phase of Krieg's model rarely appeared.

Phase two of Krieg's model calls for the homilist to identify and articulate the congregation's sentiments about the death of the deceased. Four questions were used to ascertain the extent to which the required content appeared in the 24 homilies. Out of a possible score of 12, two homilies were given scores of 9 and one a score of 10, and thus were ranked high. Eight of the homilies were given scores of zero or one and were thus ranked low. The remaining 14 homilies were ranked medium on phase two of the Krieg model.

The focus of the third phase of Krieg's model is the sacred scriptures. More precisely, the purpose of this part of the funeral homily is to draw out the sense of the readings proclaimed and then relate that message to the assembly's sentiments, on the one hand, and to the paschal mystery on the other. Nine distinct questions were used to deal with this critical part of the homily. The highest scores obtained were two scores of 16, out of a possible maximum of 27. In addition, there were two scores of 14 and two of 15. Hard as it is to believe, in almost half of the homilies no explicit reference at all was made to the scripture readings, and in a number of other cases only token references were made.

The fourth phase of the Krieg model calls for the homilist to present a verbal portrait of the deceased. The preacher is to pinpoint a unifying dynamic in the deceased's life, and show how this reflects a response to God's invitation to fullness of life. Ten questions were used in an attempt to tap the content called for in phase four, with 30 being the highest possible score. The results indicate that two homilies were given moderately high scores of 25. In contrast, eight of the 24 homilies were given very low scores of zero or one. One obvious conclusion is that the 24 homilies studied did not do well as regards phase four. Our strong hunch is that many preachers were unsure about what personal references to the deceased are proper and expected. In other words, this could reflect some confusion about the distinction between a eulogy and a homily. One could safely assume that all of the preachers were aware of the official church prohibition of preaching eulogies at funerals.

Another factor that may help to explain the results obtained on phase four of the Krieg model is the practice of delivering "words of remembrance" at Catholic funerals. Eighteen of the 24 homilies studied had someone, usually a member of the deceased's family, deliver "words of remembrance." Often these presentations were referred to as eulogies, by the presiders and by others. In our opinion, giving a chronological history of the deceased, as is often done in the "words of remembrance," is not a substitute for what Krieg intends in phase four of his model.

The final phase of Krieg's model calls for the homilist to express wonder at God's ways and to give honour to the deceased. Four questions were used to evaluate how well the 24 homilies did in this regard. An examination of the findings reveals one perfect score of 12, and one high score of ten, along with two low scores of two. In general, most of the homilies in this research project tended to neglect what phase five of the Krieg model calls for, and instead returned to the theme of extending empathy.

The scores for the five phases of the Krieg model can be added up to produce total scores for each of the 24 homilies, with the highest possible score being 102. The highest actual score obtained was 74, with only three scores being above 60. Conversely, the two lowest scores were 9 and 11 out of 102. The average total score for the 24 homilies was 36.

In summary, the data clearly suggest that the 24 homilies used in this research project did not follow Krieg's model of what a funeral homily should be. While the 24 homilies are not a statistically random sample of Roman Catholic funeral preaching, they are a representative sample of the preaching at 80 percent of the English-speaking parishes of one large Canadian city in a given four-month period. Whatever the preachers at these 24 Catholic funerals used as models for their homilies, they did not resemble Krieg's model very closely.8

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Eulogies

As was noted earlier, in 18 out of the 24 funerals from which data were gathered, "eulogies" of a sort were given at various times during the services, and by someone other than the preacher. According to Krieg's model of what a funeral
homily should be, much of the material given in the 18 "eulogies" should have been incorporated into what was said by the preachers. While most of the preachers did make some reference to the deceased, very few met the requirements of the Krieg model, which sees reference to the life of the deceased as an essential component of a funeral homily. It seems reasonable to assume that all of the 24 preachers were aware of the official church position prohibiting eulogies at funerals. Likely this awareness made many of them cautious. Hence they assiduously avoided or severely limited references to the deceased. One consequence of such an approach is that the impact of funeral preaching is neutralized to a significant degree.

Data were also compiled on how many minutes it took to deliver the 24 homilies and the 18 "eulogies." The delivery time for the homilies varied from one that took barely one minute to two that lasted 17 minutes. The "one-minute homily" was at best a token gesture and can hardly be called a homily by any accepted standards, much less as measured by the Krieg model. The average length of the 24 homilies was nine minutes, with about two-thirds of the homilies ranging from five to 13 minutes in length.

The fact that "eulogies" were given at 18 of the 24 funerals was a higher percentage than we expected. The length of these "eulogies," as they were often referred to on the remembrance cards and/or by the presiders, varied from three to 15 minutes, with the average being eight minutes. The content of most of these presentations centered on the life of the deceased, with an emphasis on his or her accomplishments. In the 18 funerals where both homilies and "eulogies" were delivered, it took from six to 24 minutes to do this. Frequently the "eulogies" were longer than the homilies.

Conclusions

This article is a discussion of the preaching at Catholic funerals, from the points of view of both theory and practice. Krieg's model of what a funeral homily should be was used to evaluate the actual preaching at 24 Catholic funerals. The general conclusion is that none of the 24 preachers appeared to be following the Krieg model. It is possible that the preachers of the homilies that scored relatively high in this research project were following a model of some other kind, consciously or unconsciously, but what this might have been is not clear.

What is of even greater concern to the researchers is the unexpected and surprising finding that so many of the 24 preachers practically ignored the sacred scriptures. This cannot be explained in terms of the Krieg model or any other model of what a homily should be. The preachers who disregarded the scriptures generally also disregarded or made only veiled references to the paschal mystery.

Recommended Reading


Worship and Culture in Contemporary Lutheran Thought

Liturgy and culture is an important issue on the contemporary Roman Catholic agenda, from Vatican Council II to the recent Vatican document, “Fourth Instruction on the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy” and into the future.

Other churches have also been wrestling with this subject, and in important ways it has become an ecumenical issue. The Lutheran World Federation has been studying the relation of culture to faith and worship since 1976. In 1993 and 1994 it held important international consultations in Switzerland and in Hong Kong, with leadership by Lutheran liturgists such as Gordon W. Lathrop and S. Anita Stauffer and by Roman Catholic liturgist Anscar J. Chupungco, and input from persons from all around the world. The proceedings of these consultations were published under the title Worship and Culture in Dialogue. Some of Anscar Chupungco’s other contributions to the Lutheran study have recently been published in his Worship: Progress and Tradition.

A further international consultation, held in Nairobi, Kenya, in January 1996, produced the following statement on worship and culture. It is particularly helpful for all churches in its concise formulation of four dimensions of the relationship between culture and liturgy. It is reprinted here, with permission. A brief preface and a concluding “challenge” to the Lutheran churches around the world have been omitted.

Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities

Introduction

Worship is the heart and pulse of the Christian Church. In worship we celebrate together God’s gracious gifts of creation and salvation, and are strengthened to live in response to God’s grace. Worship always involves actions, not merely words. To consider worship is to consider music, art, and architecture, as well as liturgy and preaching.

1 See “The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation,” by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, National Bulletin on Liturgy, vol. 28, no. 143 (Winter 1995) 228-249

2 S. Anita Stauffer, ed., Worship and Culture in Dialogue: Reports of International Consultations Cartigny, Switzerland, 1993 and Hong Kong, 1994 (Geneva: Department for Theology and Studies, The Lutheran World Federation, 1994). This important work may be ordered from the Publications Office, Lutheran World Federation, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland; its price is US$ 10 (surface mail).

3 Anscar J. Chupungco, Worship: Progress and Tradition (Beltsville, MD: The Pastoral Press, 1995)
The reality that Christian worship is always celebrated in a given local cultural setting draws our attention to the dynamics between worship and the world's many local cultures.

Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways. First, it is transcultural, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture. Second, it is contextual, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture). Third, it is counter-cultural, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture. Fourth, it is cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures. In all four dynamics, there are helpful principles which can be identified.

Worship as Transcultural

The resurrected Christ whom we worship, and through whom by the power of the Holy Spirit we know the grace of the Triune God, transcends and indeed is beyond all cultures. In the mystery of his resurrection is the source of the transcultural nature of Christian worship. Baptism and Eucharist, the sacraments of Christ's death and resurrection, were given by God for all the world. There is one Bible, translated into many tongues, and biblical preaching of Christ's death and resurrection has been sent into all the world. The fundamental shape of the principal Sunday act of Christian worship, the Eucharist or Holy Communion, is shared across cultures: the people gather, the Word of God is proclaimed, the people intercede for the needs of the Church and the world, the eucharistic meal is shared, and the people are sent out into the world for mission. The great narratives of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit, and our Baptism into him, provide the central meanings of the transcultural times of the Church's year: especially Lent/Easter/Pentecost and, to a lesser extent, Advent/Christmas/Epiphany. The ways in which the shapes of the Sunday Eucharist and the Church year are expressed vary by culture, but their meanings and fundamental structure are shared around the globe. There is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one Eucharist.

Several specific elements of Christian liturgy are also transcultural, e.g., reading from the Bible (although of course the translations vary), the ecumenical creeds and the Our Father, and Baptism in water in the Triune Name.

The use of this shared core liturgical structure and these shared liturgical elements in local congregational worship – as well as the shared act of people assembling together, and the shared provision of diverse leadership in that assembly (although the space for the assembly and the manner of the leadership vary) – are expressions of Christian unity across time, space, culture, and confession. The recovery in each congregation of the clear centrality of these transcultural and ecumenical elements renews the sense of this Christian unity and gives all churches a solid basis for authentic contextualization.

Worship as Contextual

Jesus whom we worship was born into a specific culture of the world. In the mystery of his incarnation are the model and the mandate for the contextualization of Christian worship. God can be and is encountered in the local cultures of our world. A given culture's values and patterns, insofar as they are consonant with the values of the Gospel, can be used to express the meaning and purpose of Christian worship. Contextualization is a necessary task for the
Church's mission in the world, so that the Gospel can be ever more deeply rooted in diverse local cultures.

Among the various methods of contextualization, that of dynamic equivalence is particularly useful. It involves re-expressing components of Christian worship with something from a local culture that has an equal meaning, value, and function. Dynamic equivalence goes far beyond mere translation; it involves understanding the fundamental meanings both of elements of worship and of the local culture, and enabling the meanings and actions of worship to be "encoded" and re-expressed in the language of local culture.

In applying the method of dynamic equivalence, the following procedure may be followed. First, the liturgical ordo (basic shape) should be examined with regard to its theology, history, basic elements, and cultural backgrounds. Second, those elements of the ordo that can be subjected to dynamic equivalence without prejudice to their meaning should be determined. Third, those components of culture that are able to re-express the Gospel and the liturgical ordo in an adequate manner should be studied. Fourth, the spiritual and pastoral benefits our people will derive from the changes should be considered.

Local churches might also consider the method of creative assimilation. This consists of adding pertinent components of local culture to the liturgical ordo in order to enrich its original core. The baptismal ordo of "washing with water and the Word," for example, was gradually elaborated by the assimilation of such cultural practices as the giving of white vestments and lighted candles to the neophytes of ancient mystery religions. Unlike dynamic equivalence, creative assimilation enriches the liturgical ordo – not by culturally re-expressing its elements, but by adding to it new elements from local culture.

In contextualization the fundamental values and meanings of both Christianity and of local cultures must be respected.

An important criterion for dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation is that sound or accepted liturgical traditions are preserved in order to keep unity with the universal Church's tradition of worship, while progress inspired by pastoral needs is encouraged. On the side of culture, it is understood that not everything can be integrated with Christian worship, but only those elements that are connatural to (that is, of the same nature as) the liturgical ordo. Elements borrowed from local culture should always undergo critique and purification, which can be achieved through the use of biblical typology.

Worship as Counter-cultural

Jesus Christ came to transform all people and all cultures, and calls us not to conform to the world, but to be transformed with it (Romans 12.2). In the mystery of his passage from death to eternal life is the model for transformation, and thus for the counter-cultural nature of Christian worship. Some components of every culture in the world are sinful, dehumanizing, and contradictory to the values of the Gospel. From the perspective of the Gospel, they need critique and transformation. Contextualization of Christian faith and worship necessarily involves challenging of all types of oppression and social injustice wherever they exist in earthly cultures.

It also involves the transformation of cultural patterns which idolize the self or the local group at the expense of a wider humanity, or which give central place to the
acquisition of wealth at the expense of the care of the earth and its poor. The
tools of the counter-cultural in Christian worship may also include the deliberate
maintenance or recovery of patterns of action which differ intentionally from
prevailing cultural models. These patterns may arise from a recovered sense of
Christian history, or from the wisdom of other cultures.

Worship as Cross-cultural

Jesus came to be the Savior of all people. He welcomes the treasures of earthly
cultures into the city of God. By virtue of Baptism, there is one Church; and one
means of living in faithful response to Baptism is to manifest ever more deeply
the unity of the Church. The sharing of hymns and art and other elements of
worship across cultural barriers helps enrich the whole Church and strengthen
the sense of the *communio* of the Church. This sharing can be ecumenical as
well as cross-cultural, as a witness to the unity of the Church and the oneness of
Baptism. Cross-cultural sharing is possible for every church, but is especially
needed in multicultural congregations and member churches.

Care should be taken that the music, art, architecture, gestures and postures,
and other elements of different cultures are understood and respected when they
are used by churches elsewhere in the world. The criteria for contextualization
[above] should be observed.

**CANADIAN STUDIES IN LITURGY Number 7**

*RCIA and the Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis*

At its annual meeting of October 1995, the Ontario Liturgical Conference had a series of
lectures on the *Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis* or Mystagogy in the RCIA. These
lectures are published in this issue of *Canadian Studies in Liturgy*, for the benefit of all
those who work with RCIA groups, especially in the time after full initiation into
the Catholic faith.

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- How do the liturgies of the Easter Season (50 Days) unfold the richness of the paschal
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- How do we help neophytes reflect on their experience at Sunday Eucharist and grow
  in their understanding of Eucharist?
- How do we live out in our daily Christian life the faith that we profess or renew at the
  Easter Vigil?

Most RCIA teams have been faced with the above questions as they searched for ways to
lead their neophytes through the final 50 days of their formal gatherings and sharing. Many
resources are available to help teams lead catechumens and elect through the other stages
of the RCIA, but little is available for this very important stage of the RCIA process. This
issue of *CSL* is intended to provide some assistance to these teams.

*For pricing and ordering information contact:*

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