

# Advent offers invitation to explore

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Advent has always been one of my favorite seasons in the church year. I suppose that is because during these weeks the church calls us to a special kind of awareness of God's presence and purpose in all the events of our daily lives. We're invited to this awareness not only in such major moments of our human experience as birth, marriage and death, but also — perhaps especially — in the routine rhythms of our lives.

I am thinking of such activities as: greeting loved ones in the morning and bidding them peaceful rest at night; attending difficult meetings; celebrating with friends; caring for the ill; working an extra job to make ends meet; praying; laughing and weeping.

Advent brings a special invitation and privileged opportunity to look beneath the surface of ordinary events and experiences to find their deeper meaning — and, ultimately, to find God in all of them. It is a reflection of the meaning of the events that fill and change our lives. It is a long, loving look at what is real. It is a kind of contemplation that helps to center us, and allows us to appreciate more deeply the dignity and holiness with which we're endowed by a loving God.

That kind of exploration requires some measure of peace and inner freedom, and



## A LONG THE WAY

it requires some time. But it need not be difficult or complicated. Think of the kind of attention a mother pays to a newborn child the first time she holds him or her. Or the kind of attention most of us pay to a radiant sunset, to a fire on a cold night or to a fine piece of art.

We don't rush through such experiences. We linger over them as long as we can. As we enjoy them, we are conscious of all the feelings they evoke and of the associations to which they give rise. And when such experiences are over, we realize that even the memory of them can work magic in us.

If Advent brings both an invitation and opportunity for such contemplation, it

also invites us to a joyful hope about the future. God is not finished with us yet; what God has begun in us is through the saving activity of Christ and will come to completion when Christ returns in glory.

And so we are freed to hope for the future with a real confidence. We are invited to dream impossible dreams because we know that God is always faithful. Think about these prophecies from Isaiah, which are contained in our Advent readings: "one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again;" "the wolf shall be the guest of the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;" "the baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair."

These prophecies are all impossible now. But they express the truth that nothing is impossible to God — that when God's reign is full within and among us, we will experience the fullness of peace suggested by Isaiah's words.

Please, dear friends, do try to find some time each day between now and Christmas to take a long, loving look at people, events and circumstances that give shape to your life. It is a way of appreciating God's daily care. It builds confidence that finally we'll be defined, not by our obvious limitations, but by the fullness of God's love for us.

Peace to all.

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