

⊕ LIVING COMPASS

Living Well Through Advent 2021



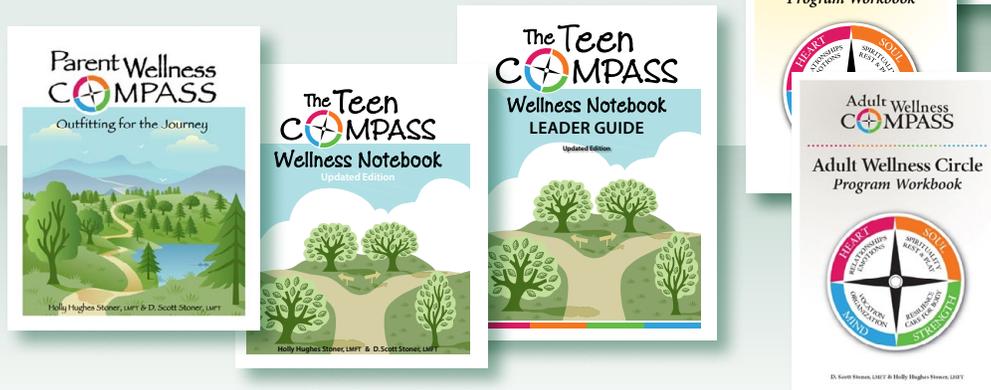
*Practicing Patience with All Your
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

A Living Compass Seasonal Resource

The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative

In addition to our Advent and Lent devotionals (in English and Spanish), Living Compass offers a number of resources (faith-based and secular) and trainings designed to outfit individuals, families, congregations, and organizations for the journey toward wellness and wholeness. Recognizing that we have a variety of resources that can be used in many creative ways, we offer several ways to learn about, experience, and to become more familiar with them.

We invite you to visit our website: livingcompass.org. There you will find more detailed information about our resources, including books, workbooks, facilitator guides for many of our programs, Wellness Circles, Community Wellness Advocate Certificate Trainings, as well as individual training and consultation options. You can also sign up for the Living Compass newsletter, which is the best way to learn about upcoming trainings, highlighted resources, and other opportunities.



Announcing our next Community Wellness Advocate Training Cohort, starting in January 2022!

To register or for more information on this program, as well as our other resources and trainings, please contact our Program Director Carolyn Karl at Carolyn@livingcompass.org.

Living Well Through Advent 2021



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The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative was created with a generous gift from Ab and Nancy Nicholas.

While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to inspire us and to make this resource possible.



Outfitting individuals, families, congregations, and organizations with tools and training for the journey toward wellness and wholeness.

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- This guide is also available as an eBook on amazon.com, and as a free PDF download at livingcompass.org/advent
 - Find us on the web: livingcompass.org
 - Questions? Email us: info@livingcompass.org

About the Writers

Robbin Brent is the director of Publications and Resource Development for Living Compass, a spiritual director, founder of Wisdom Way of Knowing, and the former director of the Center for Spiritual Resources in NC. Robbin is an experienced leader of spiritual retreats and programs, facilitates gatherings of contemplative leaders around the world, and is a graduate of Shalem Institute's *Transforming Community* program. She loves spending time with her two sons and grandson, hiking, and early morning coffee and communing with the wildlife that graces her backyard.

The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston is an elder in the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the retired Bishop of Alaska. He is the author of *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus* and several other books. He has served on the faculty of three major seminaries and was the President and Dean of Episcopal Divinity School. The Charleston House of Interfaith Cooperation was named in his honor at his alma mater, Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski is an Episcopal priest, licensed marriage and family therapist practicing Telemental Health in Wisconsin, and works part time with the Living Compass team. Jan and Dennis have been married for over 40 years. Between the families of their four adult sons, they are blessed with nine grandchildren who are the absolute joys of their lives. Dancing and performing in parades with the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies, knitting, and sipping almond milk lattes are also a source of life and joy for Jan.

The Rev. Jason Lavann serves as priest at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He lives in the rectory with his partner Kristy, two dogs (Blue and Ed), and cat Leo. Jason's passion for parish ministry stems from his love of connecting with people and learning how God is alive and active in their everyday lives. Jason and Kristy love running, hiking, camping, concerts, theater, and relaxing with the dogs in the church courtyard!



Amy Sander Montanez is a therapist, spiritual director, coach, retreat leader, and writer in private practice in Columbia SC. She specializes in working with clergy and seminarians, and is known for her compassionate work with couples and individuals. Her first book, *Moment to Moment: The Transformative Power of Everyday Life*, won Spirituality and Practice's top 100 books of the year in 2013. Along with a colleague, she blogs at messymarvelous.com and has published two Messy Marvelous Guides—*LAUNCH: A Guide To Adulthood*, and *LOVE: A Guide To Life Partnering*. Amy's favorite way to spend free time is in the company of intimate friends around a table of delicious food and wine.

The Rev. Lisa Senuta is an Episcopal Priest serving in the diocese of Kansas as director of Spiritual Formation and Clergy Care. Trained through Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington DC, her vocation focuses on spiritual guidance and faith development. Her deepest pleasure is found in relationships new and old. And she loves gardening, hiking, and poetry, where there is no end to discovering God's joy.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner—founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative—has served his community for more than 30 years as an Episcopal priest, retreat leader, licensed marriage and family therapist, and author. In addition to his coaching and psychotherapy work, he leads wellness retreats for organizations and leadership teams. Scott has been married to Holly Hughes Stoner for 42 years and together they are the co-creators of *The Teen Compass* and the *Parent Wellness Compass*. In his free time, Scott loves cycling, running, and soccer, and spending time with family, especially with his two grandsons.

Introduction



I believe that one of the core components of living a life of wellness and wholeness is learning to delay gratification. Perhaps one of the clearest ways to understand this is to consider how easy it is to compromise our well-being by seeking immediate gratification. Eating whatever we want, whenever we want, will negatively affect our physical wellness. Reacting immediately when we are flooded with anxiety or anger will almost always compromise our emotional and relational wellness. Giving in to the urge to buy more and more rather than learning to save will compromise our financial wellness. Seeking quick and simplistic answers to our questions and concerns regarding faith, rather than learning to be patient and “trust in the slow work of God” (Teilhard), will diminish our spiritual wellness.

At the heart of learning to delay gratification is learning to practice patience. In a culture that glorifies immediate gratification, learning to wait is counter-cultural. This makes *Practicing Patience* a perfect theme for our 2021 Advent reflections because the season of Advent is counter-cultural. The emphasis on immediate gratification increases tenfold as we rush full-speed ahead into the Christmas season. We are encouraged to give in to the barrage of invitations to eat more, do more, drink more, and buy more this time of year. The season of Advent—along with these reflections—provides us with the support we need to slow down in order to make counter-cultural choices, choices that will help prepare us for the true meaning of Christmas.

We are grateful for our four guest writers this Advent: Steven Charleston, Jason Lavann, Amy Sander Montanez, and Lisa Senuta. We are also blessed by the writing of two of my Living Compass colleagues: Robbin Brent and Jan Kwiatkowski. Each of these voices will help us to reflect on where the Spirit is calling us to practice patience in our lives.

It is good to be on this Advent journey together with you.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Scott Stoner".

Director, Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative



Join Our Facebook Advent Retreat Group & Sign Up for Our Daily Devotional Emails

Are there others with whom you might want to share this Advent journey through this devotional booklet? Following are two additional ways you, and others, can deepen your experience of Advent.

Visit us at LivingCompass.org/Advent to learn more or to sign up.



Living Well Through Advent 2021
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Advent Facebook Retreat Group

We would like to invite you to join our Advent Facebook retreat group. If you participate in this private group, you will be enriched by your interactions with hundreds of others who are also reading this devotional.

Daily Devotional Emails

We also are offering an opportunity for you to have the reflections from this devotional emailed to you each day during Advent.

Visit us at LivingCompass.org/Advent to learn more or to sign up.



Living Compass—working with The Rev. Pedro and Estella Lopez from the Episcopal Diocese of Texas—has also published *Vivir un buen Adviento en el 2021: Practicando la paciencia con todo el corazón, alma, fuerzas y mente*, a Spanish Advent devotional with completely original content, featuring writers The Rev. Jose C. Arroyo, The Rvdmo. Rafael L. Morales Maldonado, The Rev. Luz Cabrera Montes, and The Rev. Margarita Santana. To learn more or to order, contact us: info@livingcompass.org.



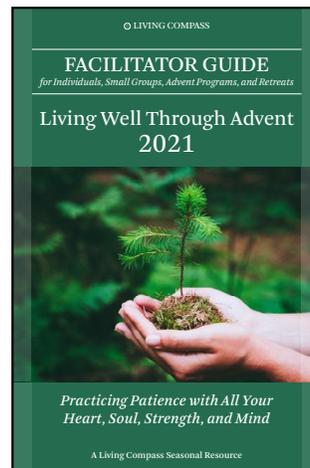
The Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Advent 2021

Advent Year C	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
First Sunday of Advent November 28, 2021	Jeremiah 33:14-16	Psalm 25:1-10	1 Thessalonians 3:9-13	Luke 21:25-36
Second Sunday of Advent December 5, 2021	Baruch 5:1-9 OR Malachi 3:1-4	Luke 1:68-79	Philippians 1:3-11	Luke 3:1-6
Third Sunday of Advent December 12, 2021	Zephaniah 3:14-20	Isaiah 12:2-6	Philippians 4:4-7	Luke 3:7-18
Fourth Sunday of Advent December 19, 2021	Micah 5:2-5a	Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 80:1-7	Hebrews 10:5-10	Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

Ways to Use “Practicing Patience”

This guide is intended to be used for daily personal reflection as you journey through Advent. Each Sunday begins with a reflection written by one of our featured writers. Every Monday in Advent we introduce a theme for the week related to *practicing patience*. The other days of the week begin with a scripture or quote, followed by a reflection, making-it-personal questions for reflection, and then a few lines where you can record any thoughts, feelings, or insights. If you'd like to write more than space allows, we encourage you to purchase a journal to use with this devotional.

Practicing Patience can also be used by groups. We all benefit from a community of support, and this guide can be used to form or deepen that community. If you would like to use it for a church Advent program (online, or in person if possible), our Facilitator Guide (offered as a free downloadable PDF) provides guidance on how to use this devotional in a small group. Available on our website: LivingCompass.org/Advent.



A couple of other suggested uses:

- Congregations could make this guide available to its members to help keep the focus on Christ during the season of Advent.
- As the resource for an Advent retreat (online or in person). The retreat leader could offer the daily reading as the reflection, or as a starting point for their own reflections. Following each reflection, participants could record their responses, either in the devotional, or in a separate journal. The leader could provide each participant with a copy of this guide so that the experience of the retreat stays with them throughout the remainder of Advent.

This Advent season, however you use this guide, our hope and prayer is that you feel supported in your desire to more fully practice your faith in a way that is deeply renewing.

The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

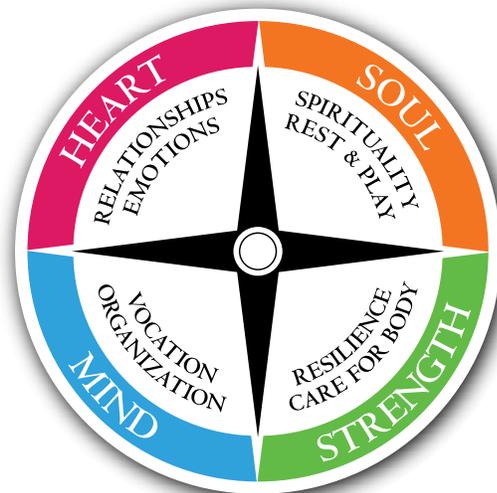
—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

The Living Compass Model for Well-Being points us toward the four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. These dimensions are interconnected—each one affects the other. We are not compartmentalized people. Whatever impacts one area of our lives (positively or negatively) has an impact on the other areas. Each of the four quadrants focuses on two areas of well-being, and each of the eight areas helps to guide and equip us as we commit to being more intentional about the way we live our lives. The purpose of this Compass is to provide a dynamic resource that will assist us in our search for balance and wellness.

Areas of Wellness

Heart

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.
- **Handling Emotions.** The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.



The Living Compass



Soul

- **Spirituality.** The ability to connect with a higher purpose in life and to have a clear set of beliefs, morals, and values that guides our actions.
- **Rest and Play.** The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.

Strength

- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.
- **Care for the Body.** The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.

Mind

- **Organization.** The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.
- **Vocation.** The ability to align our life's purpose with the gifts and talents we've been given. This includes work, volunteer service, and any educational/enrichment activities.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of spirituality and wellness is what makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we intentionally choose the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that “health,” “healing,” “wholeness,” and “holy” all come from the same root word “hal” or “haelen.”

The First Sunday of Advent

Sunday, November 28, 2021

Seeds, Waiting, and Patience

by Lisa Senuta

A seed knows how to wait.

—Hope Jahren, *Lab Girl*

In the beginning there is a seed, a thought, a spark, a light, a word; Advent is the time before the birth of Jesus Christ. You could say it is the germination moment of the new life of peace he revealed.

Most of us skip Advent. The season is brief and busy and Christmas seems like the real goal anyway. And yet, like a seed in the fertile ground waiting and waiting, hidden beneath the surface of anxious scriptures predicting final judgment, Advent is rich with spiritual guidance.

It is fair to say that we are not generally good at waiting. One click and we can purchase something that will be at our doorstep the next day. Within the stories and themes of Advent is the value of patience for growth, wholeness, and peace.

Hope Jahren, in *Lab Girl*, writes about seeds in a way that helps me to understand patience. “A seed knows how to wait. Most seeds wait for at least a year before starting to grow; a cherry seed can wait for a hundred years no problem. What exactly each seed is waiting for is known only to that seed. Some unique trigger-combination of temperature-moisture-light and many other things is required to convince a seed to jump off the deep end and take its chance—to take its one and only chance to grow.”

The predictable human need for patience in traffic, with a child, or waiting in line are moments of rush and weariness. The wisdom of the humble seed teaches that patience is not about the thing we urgently want to hurry up and happen. Patience is about growth.

Our chronic need for more patience reveals a desire for ease and gratitude in ordinary life. Everyone says, “I need more patience,” because most of us put off our journey toward becoming whole in one way or another.



Monday, November 29, 2021

Practicing Awareness of Our Impatience

by Scott Stoner

Dear God, Give me patience, and give it to me now!

—Anonymous

Each of the four weeks of Advent will focus on a theme related to the overall theme of *practicing patience with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind*. This first week of Advent we will focus on becoming more aware of our impatience. This may seem like an odd place to start, but we think it is always wise to begin with honest self-assessment. It's hard to change or grow if we don't first acknowledge where we are. If, for example, I want to begin to manage my finances more wisely, a crucial first step would be to begin by reflecting honestly on my current spending, saving, and sharing habits.

Following this line of thinking, this week we will invite you to simply observe and become more curious about how and when impatience shows up in your life. When are you impatient with yourself? When are you impatient with others? When are you impatient with God? How does this get expressed? When do you have trouble delaying gratification or waiting?

Self-reflection can be humbling, and so we want to be sure that we are doing it with love, gentleness, and patience, toward ourselves and others. May we be blessed on our journey.

Making It Personal: On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is wanting instant gratification all the time, and 10 is being completely patient at all times, how patient are you? On that same scale, where would you like to be? What are your initial ideas about practices, habits, or disciplines that could help you make the changes you desire?

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

The Heart and Patience

by Scott Stoner

Inside all of our impatience is God's invitation to trust and to grow in all our circumstances.

—Lisa Senuta

The *Heart* quadrant of the Living Compass Model for Well-Being focuses on *Handling Emotions* and *Healthy Relationships*—two areas of our lives where impatience often shows up. During this time of year, we frequently spend more time than usual with family and friends that we don't often see. Opportunities to practice patience will likely be abundant in the next few weeks.

Is there someone in your life right now with whom you feel particularly impatient? Allow yourself to name that without judgment and simply be curious about it. In her reflection for this past Sunday, Lisa Senuta wrote that as we observe our impatience more closely, what we might find is “God's invitation to trust and to grow in all our circumstances.”

When we feel impatient with others, we often focus only on what bothers us about that person. One habit that can help to diminish our impatience is to choose instead to focus on something we genuinely appreciate about the person with whom we feel impatient. What we pay attention to is what tends to grow, and so shifting our focus to something we value or appreciate in another person can help us to reduce our impatience while deepening our bond with them.

Making It Personal: Bring to mind someone with whom you feel impatient right now. Do you see in that impatience, as Lisa Senuta writes about, an invitation from God to trust and grow? If so, what is your response to that invitation?



Wednesday, December 1, 2021

The Soul, Gratitude, and Patience

by Robbin Brent

Spirituality comes from spiritus, which means life, breath, aliveness. Spirituality is aliveness on all levels. ... When people are grateful, they come alive.

—Brother David Steindl-Rast

The *Soul* quadrant of the Living Compass Model for Well-Being focuses on *Spirituality* and *Rest and Play*—two areas of our lives that we can leverage for our practice of patience. When we create space in our lives, especially when we are overstressed or overly busy, for rest and play, we build reserves of energy and resilience that will carry over into other areas of our lives, and will definitely help us to be more patient.

One powerful spiritual practice, and an antidote for impatience, we can engage is the practice of gratitude. Genuine gratitude. This practice doesn't involve a fishing expedition to find only "happy" or positive things for which we are grateful, but to take an honest look at those places and moments in our lives where we are aware of the loving presence of God. No matter what. To identify those things for which we can express authentic gratitude.

One way of beginning is to think about three things for which you are grateful and write them down in a journal. It might be helpful to consider one or more of the eight areas of wellness seen with the "eyes of the heart." Return to this gratitude practice for the remainder of Advent as a reminder of the goodness and grace and wonder the surrounds you.

Making it Personal: Take a few minutes to write down three things for which you are grateful. If you find this challenging, you might ask yourself if there is anything getting in the way of looking for authentic sources of gratitude? Can you see how a practice of gratitude could help you to be more patient?

Thursday, December 2, 2021

Strength and Patience

by Scott Stoner

Is everything as urgent as your stress would imply?

—Carrie Latet, poet

The *Strength* quadrant of the Living Compass Model of Well-Being focuses on *Care for the Body* and *Resilience*. It can be especially challenging this time of year to make good decisions in these two areas of wellness. Most of us find that we have to be particularly intentional about caring for our physical wellness and managing our stress as we negotiate the holiday season.

There is a reciprocal relationship between stress and impatience. High stress levels can lead to being more impatient—with ourselves and others. Likewise, being impatient can lead to higher stress levels, which can, in turn, drain our energy.

In our Living Compass resources, we often talk about how our faith acts as our compass in life. When we make our faith our compass in all areas of wellness, we will experience the peace that God intends for us. During this time of year, there are many other “compasses” competing to guide our decisions. The pull of our consumer culture can have a strong influence on us, as can the pull of our families, friends, and others. Other people’s ideas of how we “should” be celebrating Christmas often differ from our own, and if we are not mindful, we may find our levels of stress and impatience growing.

Making It Personal: Take a moment to write down a few thoughts on what it means for you to make the compass of your faith/spirituality your primary compass for Advent and Christmas. Do you see a relationship between using faith/spirituality as your compass, and having more patience?



Friday, December 3, 2021

Expecting Shade from a Seed

by Robbin Brent

The wisdom of the humble seed teaches that patience is not about the thing we urgently want to hurry up and happen. Patience is about growth.

—Lisa Senuta

The *Mind* quadrant of the Living Compass Model of Well-Being focuses on *Vocation* and *Organization*. By vocation, we mean having a clear sense of meaning and purpose in all that we do. This may include work, but it is much more than that. Organization focuses on the decisions we make regarding our time, money, priorities, and possessions.

Yet, despite our best intentions, all of the distractions competing for our time, attention, and energy can challenge our ability to maintain a clear sense of our deepest purpose and meaning. We can lose sight of what we value, of what is worth waiting for. We may plant a seed and then wonder impatiently why the seed isn't already providing shade and shelter. As Lisa Senuta wrote in her Sunday reflection, Advent offers us an opportunity to remember that patience is about growth, not simply about the things we are in a hurry to have or to happen.

When we forget to turn first to God with our questions and desires, it is easy to become impatient, with ourselves, with others, and with God. Perhaps we could use our impatience as a way to recognize when we are getting ahead of ourselves and ahead of God's timing for our lives.

Making It Personal: Do you ever find yourself feeling impatient with God's timing? How might you practice being more patient with the "seeds" you, with God's help, have planted? How might prayer help you to be more trusting and patient?

Saturday, December 4, 2021

Impatiently Patient

by Jan Kwiatkowski

Let's think of something to do while we're waiting.

—Mr. Rogers

My three-year-old grandson became a big brother this year. He exhibited a joy that seemed like it would burst from his entire being as he told everyone he could about his new baby brother. After a few days, the reality hit home that he would have to wait for his “not-so-instant” playmate to grow up a little. At first, he was feeling very impatient with this new awareness. Yet, with support from his parents and grandparents, he is now learning to navigate his situation and to better handle impatience meltdowns. He is learning some things to do while waiting for his baby brother to grow.

Toward the end of his song, *Let's Think of Something to Do While We're Waiting*, Mr. Rogers sings, “You know it’s really all right; in fact, it’s downright quite bright, to think of something to do that’s specific for you.” His simple song reminds us that practicing patience is an active choice and that we all need to find our specific way.

The way impatience shows up in us can teach us how to practice patience, to think of something to do to increase our ability to practice patience. Walking, breathing, journaling, getting enough sleep, taking a time out before we say something in impatience, are just some of the things we can practice. And these practices can become prayer when we invite God into our practicing. Advent reminds us that learning to practice patience takes a lifetime and yet, God is always patient with us.

Making It Personal: Did anything surprise you (or not) about how impatience shows up in you? Is there a new “something” the Spirit might be calling you to do this Advent?

The Second Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 5, 2021

Patience As a Process

by Jason Lavann

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

—Philippians 1:6 (NLT)

One of the pleasantly frustrating qualities about my partner Kristy is her ability to fall asleep with ease. We laugh about this, but in honesty I find myself resentful because sleep never comes easily for me. Much of my struggle with falling asleep lies in my inability to deal with unfinished work. There is the professional unfinished work that keeps me awake: an ever-expanding to-do list, a homily that did not come together, a pastoral visit where I could have provided better care, or the sadness at a parish member who is disappointed with me. There is also the personal unfinished work of my life: the fact that I continually struggle with selfishness and self-consciousness, stubbornness and impatience, materialism, and wanting to be in control.

As I stir impatiently with all the unfinished work of my life, Kristy will wisely say, “The beauty of the night is that it makes room for a new day.” Maybe that is why Kristy sleeps better—she carries the understanding that unfinished work is part of life, and even finds joy in facing it another day. Or, I think of the wise words my bishop said to me as I was getting ready to walk down the Cathedral aisle for my ordination: “Remember Jason, ordination does not make you a priest. It gives you permission to learn how to become one!”

Fifteen years later, I am still learning how to become a priest. I am still learning how to become a partner to Kristy, a friend to my dear friends, a student to my mentors, and ever since I emerged from the waters of Baptism when I was a few weeks old, I have been learning how to be a sheep of the Shepherd.



Monday, December 6, 2021

Practicing Patience With Ourselves

by Scott Stoner

*Growth is not our work to do alone, but work God
delights to continually do with and within us.*

—Jason LaVann

This week we will focus on practicing patience with ourselves. This is essential because the patience we practice with others (our focus for next week) often reflects the degree to which we are patient with ourselves. To paraphrase a core Christian teaching, we are to be patient with our neighbor, as we are patient with ourselves.

Today is St. Nicholas Day, a day especially loved by children around the world. Full of excitement, they place their little shoes out the night before, many impatiently I'm sure, and then awaken with delight to find their shoes filled with chocolate gold coins or other treats. The gold coins symbolize the generosity of the real St. Nicholas, who was known for being generous with those in need.

How might you, in the spirit of St. Nicholas, be more generous with yourself? Children spontaneously find joy and playfulness in the rituals associated with this day. Perhaps we might discover that there is a connection between being more patient with ourselves and allowing ourselves to be a little more spontaneous and playful, enjoying the very moment we are in, rather than looking to the future with impatience. In the spirit of St. Nicholas, we invite you to give that a try today.

Making It Personal: Do you see a connection between the way you practice patience with yourself and how you extend patience to others? Do you see a connection between being patient with yourself and your capacity to be spontaneous, playful, in the moment, and going with the flow? What is your response to Jason Lavann's belief that growth is not just our work, but also God's work with and within us?

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

Saying “No” Can Be a Spiritual Practice

by Scott Stoner

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

There is a great deal of pressure to act and feel a certain way this time of year. It is easy to get caught up in comparing our “insides” to everyone else’s “outsides,” meaning that we can sometimes feel like we are the only ones who might be struggling this holiday season. Maybe we don’t have our usual “holiday spirit” in the wake of the pandemic. Maybe we don’t feel like decorating our home this year. Maybe we don’t feel like doing things as we have always done them in the past.

Setting healthy boundaries that honor what we are feeling and what we need is one way we can practice patience with ourselves. Responding with a loving “no” can be just the act of self-care we may need. The pressure to say “yes”—to be the person *we think we are supposed to be*—is high, and setting healthy boundaries requires more intention, patience, and practice this time of year.

Saying “yes” to being patient with ourselves often means saying “no” to other things so that we are able to say “yes” to self-care. This is the surest way of getting more comfortable being our authentic selves in a world that is constantly trying to make us into something else.

Making It Personal: Take a moment and note any ways you feel pressured to be someone or something other than your true self right now. Is that pressure coming from within or without? How might practicing patience with yourself by saying “no” to unreasonable demands help you to be more accepting of who you are and how you feel this holiday season?



Wednesday, December 8, 2021

Serenity Now!

by Robbin Brent

*“The greatest illusion,” said the mole,
“is that life should be perfect.”*

—Charlie Mackesy, *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and the Horse*

It is very difficult to be compelled by a desire to make things perfect and to be patient with ourselves at the same time. The saying “Serenity Now!”—made famous by Frank Costanza, George’s dad on *Seinfeld*—has been a mantra I have often used when I find myself scanning for incompletions, or things I haven’t done well—aka perfectly. You don’t have to be familiar with the saying to relate to the idea that perfectionism can be a huge hurdle to a feeling of serenity. Along the way I have discovered that when I can relax my need to do everything perfectly in order to be respected and loved, I find that there is a holy perfection in everything, just as it is.

So how can we let go of perfectionism in order to be more available to all that God desires to offer through us? What could help us to be more patient with ourselves and others with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our strength, and with all of our mind?

When we can let go of unrealistic expectations and extend kindness and patience toward ourselves when we make mistakes, we are freer to experience the gift of perfection in all of God’s creation, right here, right now.

Making It Personal: Can you see the relationship between striving for things to be perfect and a lack of patience or kindness toward yourself? What might you ask God to help you let go of in order to more freely enter God’s prayer for your life?

Thursday, December 9, 2021

Grieving and Patience

by Scott Stoner

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.

—Psalm 23:1-3 (KJV)

It has been said that grief is the uninvited guest at every holiday gathering. The holidays always bring with it many emotions, and for many, the experience of grief is the one that catches us the most off-guard. It may be that this will be our first Christmas without a loved one being present, either because they have passed away, are away this year, or for some other reason. The holidays are markers of the passage of time and thus can bring with it its own unique blend of losses and change.

To be accepting and compassionate with ourselves through any grief we are experiencing requires us to be patient with ourselves and the process of grieving. If we were not raised to be comfortable with feeling or expressing sadness, this could be especially challenging. The paradox is that repressing our grief takes a great deal of psychological energy, and often we are more exhausted when we try not to feel our grief. On the other hand, patiently making room for grief and inviting it into our consciousness will help us from getting stuck in it, or allowing it to define our whole experience of the holidays. And, as Christians, our faith promises us that love has the power to heal our grieving hearts.

Making It Personal: Are you experiencing any sense of grief or loss this holiday season? If so, are you able to be patient with yourself and acknowledge to yourself and others what you are feeling? Can you think of someone with whom you could share any grief or loss you are experiencing?



Friday, December 10, 2021

Gratitude and Patience

by Robbin Brent

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Scripture encourages us to be grateful *in* all things, not necessarily to be grateful *for* all things. As we mentioned last week, a regular practice of gratitude can help to create a safe space in which to notice both what keeps us in the flow of God’s love and desires for us, and what pushes us out of that flow. What nurtures our ability to be patient with ourselves, and what keeps us from extending kindness toward ourselves.

Some days it might be gratitude for a sense of wonder. Other days it might be gratitude for a prayer or a nudge that something in our lives is calling out for our attention.

A gratitude practice can offer us opportunities to discover what touches our hearts and the hearts of others, what inspires a lasting joy, and what allows us to listen more deeply for the ways our prayer joins with God’s prayer for us in every area of our lives.

Today we invite you to take a few moments to consider the idea that we can choose to find gratitude *in* all things, not necessarily *for* all things. Then, list a few things for which you are authentically grateful. You might end by offering a simple prayer of thanksgiving.

Making It Personal: If you made a list of things for which you are grateful, how did that make you feel? How might a regular practice of gratitude strengthen your ability to be more patient with yourself?

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Saturday, December 11, 2021

First Pause, Then Cross

by Jan Kwiakowski

Don't cross the bridge until you come to it.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Today we reach the midpoint in our Advent journey. This is a good time to pause to look back at where we started, notice where we are now, and wonder or be hopeful about the final days of our journey. As we reflect we need to remember that there was a start, and there will be an end, to this Advent time. Truly, the only time we have is now, this moment.

We know Christmas is coming, but it is not here. The world around us may have rushed across the bridge to Christmas, but we have chosen to patiently journey to Christmas one Advent day at a time. We've come to the bridge that takes us into the final two weeks of Advent. Immanuel, God is with us.

Before crossing the bridge, you are invited to simply pause and be as present as you can to this day and to each moment of this day. One way to do that is to notice what you are grateful for in heart, soul, strength, and mind. Another is to reflect on what you have learned about practicing patience with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. Practice this pause in whatever ways Spirit is nudging you.

Making It Personal: In the rush of the season, what is it like for you to simply pause and be present? What bridge are you crossing into the last two weeks of Advent? Is there something you'd like to leave behind or take with you as you cross the bridge?

The Third Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 12, 2021

Authentic Patience

by Amy Sander Montanez

*Out
Of a great need
We are all holding hands
And climbing.
Not loving is a letting go.
Listen,
The terrain around here
Is
Far too
Dangerous
For
That.
—Rumi*

I have a confession to make. I never pray for patience, and I don't encourage others to pray for patience either. On a light-hearted level, I quip that if you pray for patience, God is sure to provide a reason for you to have to learn patience. After all, the root word *patiore* means "to suffer." No thank you to that idea. I find it difficult to pray for patience because I believe there is a complex relationship between patience and other virtues, like authenticity, truthfulness, integrity, perseverance, and my least favorite, surrender.

I kind of love it that in today's gospel passage, John the Baptizer calls the crowd a "brood of vipers." I cheer him on when he shouts what I think in my head. I have taught myself not to say things like this out loud, But I *think* things like that about people sometimes, especially when they disappoint me, because being disappointed by another is the hardest emotion for me to process. Or maybe disappointing myself is the hardest? I just know that I have such high expectations. And I ask this question often: ***Is that really the best you or I can do?*** "Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not



Monday, December 13, 2021

Practicing Patience with Others

by Scott Stoner

Why is patience so important? Because it makes us pay attention.

—Paulo Coelho

This week we invite you to shift your focus to practicing patience with others. We encourage you not only to practice patience with others “in general,” but to choose a specific person with whom you would like to be more patient, and focus on practicing patience with them. This very likely will be someone with whom you live, work, or interact with regularly. In yesterday’s reflection, Amy Sander Montanez wrote, “I seek to find a way to move forward in relationship with authenticity, truthfulness, integrity, and surrender.” Let us draw inspiration from her journey this coming week.

One of the foundational teachings of our Living Compass resources is, “Whatever we pay attention to is what will grow.” If we pay more attention to what annoys or concerns us about someone and how they are not living up to our expectations, our impatience with that person will grow. If instead we pay more attention to what is good and what we appreciate about the other person, our patience and gratitude toward that person will grow. This week we invite you to practice paying attention to what delights you about the person you have chosen to focus on, and to see if your patience with them grows.

Because emotions tend to run high during the holiday season, we will have opportunities to practice patience with friends and family members whom we don’t see that often, which can be a gift if we choose to see it that way.

Making It Personal: Do you see a connection between practicing patience and noticing what you are paying attention to about others? As you begin to pay attention to how you practice patience with others, what do you notice and learn about yourself?

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Love Is Patient

by Scott Stoner

Love is patient; love is kind; ... It does not insist on its own way.

—1 Corinthians 13:4-5

Paul's words about love in the First Letter to the Corinthians are some of the most inspiring and well-known in the Bible. From Paul we learn that love is much more than a feeling. It is, in fact, a decision, an act of our will. "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; is it not irritable or resentful; ... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

How might our patience with others be enhanced by viewing patience as a decision, not simply a feeling? One possibility is that we could decide to act with patience toward another person, even when we might not be feeling particularly so at the moment. For example, getting up at 3AM with a sick child or other loved one in our care for the third night in a row calls forth a decision to be patient and to show love, even when that is not what we might be feeling in the moment.

The decision to practice patience with others requires attention and discipline, and it is often challenging. Yet the rewards can be great, for our own emotional and spiritual growth, as well as for our relationship with the other person.

Making It Personal: Can you think of a time when you acted with patience even when you were not feeling particularly patient? What made that possible? What could help you decide to act more patiently toward someone in your life right now, even if that is not how you are currently feeling?



Wednesday, December 15, 2021

Listening and Patience

by Robbin Brent

Silence is God's first language.

—St. John of the Cross

Silence is not simply the absence of talking. It is opening the ears of the heart in order to hear what God is whispering to us. All we need is patience and a desire to deeply listen to what the Spirit is saying to each of us as God's beloved. Being patient with ourselves as we grow in our ability to listen with the expectation that we will hear God in the silence is a gift we can offer, not only to ourselves, but to those with whom we are close.

In a season filled with noise and busyness, silence can be an oasis where we join our longings and prayers with God's longings and prayers for us. As Psalm 46:10 says, "be still and know that I am God." But in order to get better at listening for God in the silence, we need to practice.

Today we invite you to try this simple practice as one way for deepening silence. Several times a day simply stop what you are doing and pay attention to everything in your environment. Simply notice and then listen for the silence beneath the sounds. Even a few moments of silence can yield much spiritual fruit. When you feel complete, you might want to offer a simple prayer of thanksgiving. Over time this practice can grow our ability to hear God in the silence.

Making It Personal: As you try this simple practice, note if it helps you to become more aware of God's loving presence. What might get in your way of valuing silence as a part of your day? Is there another practice for deepening silence you would like to try during Advent?

Thursday, December 16, 2021

Gentleness, Peace, and Patience

by Scott Stoner

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. ... And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:5, 7

When we think of strength, we typically think of power, assertiveness, and toughness. While these attributes describe particular aspects of strength, there are other qualities of strength. The New Testament reading from this past Sunday talks about one type of strength that directly applies to practicing patience: “Let your gentleness be known to everyone.”

One sure way to let our gentleness be known to everyone is by being patient with others. Patience and gentleness tend to go together. When we are impatient or irritable with others, we come across as the opposite of gentle, often acting in ways that are rude and abrasive. True emotional and spiritual strength is expressed through patience and gentleness.

The same passage from Philippians also talks about the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. This is another reminder that God’s peace transcends our usual patterns of thought and practice, and is much more than simply the absence of conflict. This understanding of peace can be helpful as we practice patience with others. Being patient with others is much more than simply not being impatient with them. It means being gentle, loving, and kind, and in doing so, modeling the more profound understanding of the peace and patience to which God calls us.

Making It Personal: Think of a time when you responded with impatience and rudeness toward someone. Now think of a time when you responded with patience and gentleness. What was the difference for you between the two exchanges? For the other person? What helps your ability to be gentle and patient more often?



Friday, December 17, 2021

Trust in the Slow Work of God

by Robbin Brent

*As spring and summer follow ... winter, so our lives
have seasons. Help us to live in the eternal moment,
awaiting your perfect timing in all things.*

—Nan Merrill, from Psalm 105, *Psalms for Praying*

In the Introduction, Scott Stoner shared a line from a well-known prayer of Teilhard de Chardin, a French priest, scientist, and theologian: “Trust in the slow work of God.” I’d like to share a bit more of this prayer in which Teilhard describes beautifully the struggle with patience that many of us face this time of year.

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.*

*We are impatient of being on the way to
something unknown, something new.*

—Teilhard de Chardin, from *Hearts on Fire*

During this busy season, many of us are not at our most patient. As we are pulled in so many different directions, we can be quick to anger or feel annoyed by the demands of others. These feelings often come as a result of our inability to remain true to what we think and say we value. When our actions are out of alignment with our thoughts and what we say we value, it is easy to feel anxious, irritable, and frustrated, especially with those we are close to.

When we experience a lack of patience, it can be helpful and healing to remember that we can trust God’s timing in all things.

Making It Personal: What is your response to Teilhard’s prayer about the challenge of trusting in God’s timing? What practices do you find helpful in being able to be more patient, to more deeply trust God?

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Saturday, December 18, 2021

Notice, Listen, Practice

by Jan Kwiakowski

I love humanity. It's people I don't like.

—Linus (Charles Schultz)

There are days when Linus' words say it all for me. I don't know anyone who doesn't have moments like Linus. We are human and we will always have a need to practice patience. We were invited this week to pay attention as we chose specific people who might give us the gift of practicing patience. We reflected on what it might take for us to exercise emotional and spiritual muscles needed to choose patience. Amy Sander Montanez pointed us to virtues associated with patience, such as authenticity, truthfulness, integrity, perseverance, and surrender.

Today I invite you to notice which words, phrases, wonderings, or reflections caught your attention this past week. As we transition into the last week of Advent, I invite you to consider if any of the nudgings from this past week, or perhaps from the previous weeks, might be calling you to carry them into the final days of Advent, or into the Christmas season, and beyond.

Perhaps the reflections might be inviting you to let go of something in order to make practicing patience a little easier. Or perhaps you might simply be thankful for the people who have provided an opportunity to more deeply love humanity *and* people.

Making It Personal: Is the Spirit inviting you to carry forward, or to let go of, something as you practice patience? How has your understanding of patience evolved during this Advent season? What, if anything, about this Advent season and the practice of patience has surprised you?

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 19, 2021

Holy Patience

by The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston

And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ... And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

—Luke 1:43,45

When you suddenly recognize that your life is about to change, do you ever find yourself saying what Elizabeth says: "And why is this happening to me ...?"

If so, you are not alone. "Why me?" Most people have asked that question at some point in their lives. We ask it when we are surprised by what we take to be good fortune. We ask it when we are confronted by our own fragility. We ask it when we receive a gift or when we face an illness. In many ways, "why me?" is the Advent question.

Advent is the season of questions because it is the season of expectations. What will happen? When will it happen? And perhaps most of all, why are we a part of it?

Deep change presents us with the graphic reminder that we are not in control of life. Things happen that we can neither predict nor prevent. This change may be joyful or heartbreaking, yet either way, we adapt to the situation. We celebrate or we learn to cope. Like Elizabeth and Mary, we are players on the stage of human life without a script, improvising our lines as we go. These two women recognize that they are about to give birth to a change they can only dimly understand. As St. Paul says, they see their part in God's great story "as through a glass but darkly." Mary's vision of what is to come is a description, not a definition. Her task is not to write the script, but to be faithful in playing her part as it comes to her. She does that by accepting the ambiguity of change, accepting the fact she may not have an answer to "why me?" but never wavering in her trust in God. She is patient in believing all will be well.



Monday, December 20, 2021

Practicing Patience with God

by Scott Stoner

Patience is trust lived.

—Steven Charleston

In this last week of Advent we turn our attention to practicing patience with God. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit named in Galatians, Chapter 5, which reminds us that patience is a natural outgrowth of our spiritual lives. Just as we can grow in our practice of being more patient with ourselves and with others, so too can we deepen our faith in God’s timing in a way that manifests itself as enhanced patience and trust.

The Gospel for yesterday, the fourth Sunday of Advent, describes the patience and trust exhibited by both Mary and Elizabeth as they wait to see what God has in store for them and their soon-to-be-born babies. As Steven Charleston wrote in yesterday’s reflection, “Patience is trust lived,” which is a perfect description of Mary and Elizabeth.

The idea that patience is trust lived in our lives both awakens and challenges us. It’s one thing for me to think I am a patient person and trust God; it’s quite another to manifest that in the way I live my life. I wonder if people who know me well would describe me as a person who exhibits patience and trust in God? I wonder how much it shows in the way I treat others and the way I order my life? I invite you to join me in reflecting on how practicing patience with God manifests itself in your life during this final week of Advent.

Making It Personal: What do you think of Steven Charleston’s idea that “patience is trust lived”? Do you think others would describe you as a person who exhibits patience and trust with God? What spiritual practices help you to be more patient with God?

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

Patience In the Midst of Deep Change

by Scott Stoner

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change; courage to change the things I
can; and wisdom to know the difference.*

—Reinhold Niebuhr

“Deep change presents us with the graphic reminder that we are not in control of life. Things happen that we can neither predict nor prevent.” These words from Steven Charleston’s reflection remind us that one of the most significant challenges to our emotional and spiritual well-being is our ability to deal with change and loss. If we have experienced a recent significant loss, the holiday season will often magnify our grief.

None of us like the feeling of not being in control. When we experience that feeling, we have choices as to how we will respond. We can attempt to avoid the feelings altogether by repressing or numbing those feelings or pretending they don’t exist. We can choose to overcompensate by trying to increase control over some other aspect of our lives. Or, we can choose to use the experience of feeling out of control as an opportunity to deepen our practice of the opening lines of the Serenity Prayer shared above.

When we use avoidance or over-functioning, we build a wall around our feelings. Not only does this not work, it creates a barrier between ourselves and God. Acknowledging and accepting our vulnerability is an essential step in deepening our spiritual root system so that we can, with God’s help, persevere in the midst of deep change in our lives.

Making It Personal: In general, how do you react when you feel some critical part of your life is out of control? Are you experiencing any of those feelings right now? If so, what would it mean for you to turn to God with those feelings?



Wednesday, December 22, 2021

The Welcoming Prayer

by Robbin Brent

To welcome and to let go is one of the most radically loving, faith-filled gestures we can make in each moment of each day. It is an open-hearted embrace of all that is in ourselves and in the world.

—Mary Mrozowski, creator of the Welcoming Prayer

Today we'll explore one spiritual practice that can help us to turn to God when we forget that God is always present and always active in our lives. Thomas Keating wrote that the purpose of this prayer is "to deepen our relationship with God through consenting in the ordinary activities of our day."

There are three steps to the Welcoming Prayer or Welcoming Practice. It is helpful if we begin by closing our eyes, taking a few deep breaths, and relaxing the body as much as possible. Then,

1. Simply notice and sink into the feelings, emotions, thoughts, sensations, and commentaries in our body right now.
2. Accept the divine indwelling in whatever we are experiencing by simply saying, "Welcome." Whatever we find, we simply greet it with, "Welcome."
3. Adopt an attitude of surrender by inwardly affirming the following intention: "I let go of the desire for security, affection, control. I let go of the desire to change the situation."

In these gestures of radical acceptance, we begin to remove any barriers to the awareness of God's loving presence in every moment of our lives.

Making it Personal: If you are practicing the Welcoming Prayer for the first time (or are returning to the practice), what was your experience? Were you able to sense God's presence beneath the current conditions of your life? Do you feel this prayer could help you as you practice patience with God, no matter what is going on in your life in the present moment?

Thursday, December 23, 2021

Dealing with Unrealistic Expectations

by Scott Stoner

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

—Luke 1:46-48

One of the root causes of impatience, whether with ourselves, others, or with God, is unrealistic expectations. I can become impatient with myself or others because there is some goal I have set that is not being met in the way I desire. Similarly, I can become impatient with God because God is not answering my prayers according to my plans and assumptions. The common theme here is my unrealistic and self-centered expectations. Too often the temptation is there for me to try and bend life and others, including God, to the needs of my own ego.

It is not unusual to struggle with unrealistic expectations this time of year. Maybe this holiday season isn't going as we expected. It is easy to get fooled by social media posts that show everyone else having the "perfect" Christmas. Naming and letting go of any unrealistic expectations can help us reconnect with the spiritual meaning of Advent and Christmas, something the dominant culture around us often fails to understand.

Mary and Joseph undoubtedly had expectations for how their lives would unfold, and it is safe to say that they could never have expected what happened to them. And yet, this week's Bible stories tell of how they let go of their expectations and learned to trust God in a whole new way. May we be inspired by these stories and do the same.

Making It Personal: Are you aware of any unrealistic expectations you are carrying right now, either of yourself, others, or of God? What can help you to let go and make room for the experience of God's presence in your life today and for the remaining days of Advent?

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2021

God's Patient Promise

by Robbin Brent

Make our hearts leap with joy, and fill our mouths with songs of praise, that we may announce glad tidings of peace, and welcome the Christ in our midst.

—prayer excerpt from *Daily Prayer for All Seasons*

During a contemplative retreat I attended ten years ago, we were invited to introduce ourselves and to name what we were bringing or leaving behind. One young woman introduced herself by saying, “I let go of hurry ...” while dropping her left shoe to the floor, “and worry,” as her right shoe dropped to the floor. I can still hear the sound of her shoes hitting the floor and the wisdom in her awareness of the relationship between hurry and worry. Her actions and words inspired me to reflect more deeply on the idea that hurry and worry often go together as co-conspirators in the sabotage of my own well-being, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, and my ability to be patient.

The story of Jesus’ birth is one that unfolds in God’s time, not ours. As many of us scurry around with last-minute preparations for Christmas celebrations, let us pause today and welcome, with joy, song, and hospitality, the anticipation of the birth of Jesus in a few short hours. In the midst of any hurry and worry, let us remember God’s promise of joy, peace, and love, for all the world. Let us be patient in our waiting, as God has been infinitely patient with us.

Making It Personal: Have you experienced a connection between the stress caused by “hurry and worry,” and your ability to be patient, with yourself, with others, or with God? In your desire to be more patient, what practices have you found helpful?

Christmas Day

December 25, 2021

Good News of Great Joy

by Robbin Brent, Jan Kwiatkowski, and Scott Stoner

And the Word became flesh and lived among us.

—John 1:14

Today is the day we have been waiting for! It is Christmas, and we celebrate the good news:

Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

—Luke 2:10-11

The Word has become flesh. A Savior, the Messiah, has come to our world. And how has the Savior come into our world? As a person with great political power? As a person with great military strength? No, the Savior has come into our world in the most vulnerable way possible, as a newborn child.

And think of how patient Mary and Joseph had to be, and indeed all who wondered who this newborn Jesus would become as he grew older and into his full identity.

The true gift of Christmas, the gift of the Word made flesh, is not like any other gift we will receive on Christmas. It is a gift that we patiently open and reopen throughout our lives.

And now it is God's turn to wait, God's turn to be patient. God waits as we continue to mature in our understanding of what the Gift truly means for us, and how we are called to share this gift with the world.

It has been an honor to travel this Advent journey with you and we thank you for joining us. We have learned much about practicing patience, and trust that you have as well.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and God's blessings to each of you.

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Soltar y dejar ir con todo el alma, fuerzas y mente

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VIVIR UNA BUENA CUARESMA 2022

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Living Well Through Advent 2021

*Practicing Patience with All Your
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

A Living Compass Seasonal Resource

Designed for use as an individual reflection or for group study, this guide provides a foundation for seeking a deeper experience of Advent, an experience that will help prepare us for the true meaning of Christmas.

Includes reflections from: Robbin Brent
The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston
The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski
The Rev. Jason Lavann
Amy Sander Montanez
The Rev. Lisa Senuta
The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner

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