

Introduction

IF GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON came striding across the threshold of your fire-crackling Christmas party, you would most likely gape in wonder, then laugh, listen, and come to love him. He might remind you of Father Christmas grinning from ear to ear, except for the cigar clenched in his mouth.

At a towering six-foot-four and weighing three hundred pounds, Chesterton was energetic and alluring, a daunting giant, whom strangers soon realized possessed the heart of an elf. He played Christmas games with children, requesting colored tinsel to paste on his own cutout cardboard figures. His contagious laughter invited others to join him in his wit and repartee, his childlike innocence, and love of life. In him was a humor akin to humility: a humor that delighted in life but refused to take the enigma of being human too seriously, a joyous humor with a sane estimate of itself and others, a holy humor that lived lightly because it trusted God for maintaining the universe.

Born in London in 1874, and dying there in 1936, Chesterton seemed a comic figure to some, but his towering intellect matched his physical height. This was a man who could write a longhand essay while simultaneously dictating another to his secretary. Having studied art at the Slade School in London, Chesterton humbly claimed his main craft as journalism. But in addition to writing a weekly article for his entire adult life, Chesterton authored more than a hundred books and contributed essays to

many more. Furthermore, he wrote capably and Christianly on almost every conceivable topic in almost every imaginable genre: literary criticism, poetry, novel, short story, biography, theology, apologetics, mystery—and the list goes on. Rather than journalist, he could be better dubbed a Christian cultural critic in the English “man of letters” tradition.

Chesterton delights many of his readers as a gracious person who fights for Christian truth, but never arrogantly, rather as a genius with an open mind, as a grateful person with deep devotion to God and commitment to stand alongside the common citizen. Perhaps you will come to find, as others before you, that Gilbert Keith Chesterton has walked into your life to make you laugh and think, to serve as your friend and mentor.

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How to Use This Book

ADVENT—that period of great anticipatory joy—is a time of preparation for the celebration of Jesus’ arrival in Bethlehem as a helpless infant. In the Western liturgy, Advent begins four Sundays prior to December 25—the Sunday closest to November 30, which is the feast of Saint Andrew, Jesus’ first disciple.

The annual commemoration of Jesus’ birth begins the Christmas cycle of the liturgical year—a cycle that runs from Christmas Eve to the Sunday after the feast of the Epiphany. In keeping with the unfolding of the message of the liturgical year, this book is designed to be used during the entire period from the First Sunday of Advent to the end of the Christmas cycle.

The four weeks of Advent are often thought of as symbolizing the four different ways that Jesus comes into the world: (1) at his birth as a helpless infant at Bethlehem, (2) at his arrival in the hearts of believers, (3) at his death, and (4) at his arrival on Judgment Day.

Because Christmas falls on a different day of the week each year, the fourth week of Advent is never really finished; it is abruptly, joyously, and solemnly abrogated by the annual coming again of Jesus at Christmas. Christ’s Second Coming will also one day abruptly interrupt our sojourn here on earth.

Since the calendar dictates the number of days in Advent, this book includes Scripture and meditation readings for a full twenty-eight days. These twenty-eight daily readings make up

Part I of this book. It is suggested that the reader begin at the beginning and, on Christmas, switch to Part II, which contains materials for the twelve days of Christmas. If there are any “extra” entries from Part I, these may be read by doubling up days, if so desired, or by reading two entries on weekends. Alternately, one may just skip these entries that do not fit within the Advent time frame for that particular year.

Each “day” in this book begins with the words of G. K. Chesterton taken from various sources as acknowledged on pages 113 and 114. Following that quotation is an excerpt from Scripture, which is related in some way to the beginning quote. Next is provided a small prayer, also built on the ideas from the two preceding passages. Finally, an Advent or Christmas activity is suggested as a way to apply the messages to one’s daily life.

Part III of this book proposes two optional formats for using each day as part of a longer liturgical observance similar to Night Prayer combined with a version of the Office of Readings. These options are for those who may wish to use this book as part of a more-developed individual or group observance. The purpose of these readings is to enrich the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season of the liturgical year and set up a means by which individuals, families, or groups may observe the true meaning of the season.

