

*A*DVENT *and*
CHRISTMAS
—— *with* ——
FULTON J. SHEEN

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*Compiled and Edited
by Judy Bauer*

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John of the Cross, in his book *The Living Flame of Love*, compares our pre-Advent selves to green logs that have been thrown into a fire, the fire of love. Green logs, we know, do not immediately burst into flame. Rather, being young and full of moisture, they sizzle for a long time before they reach kindling temperature and can take into themselves the fire that is around them.

So, too, the rhythm of love. Only the really mature can truly burst into flame within community. The rest of us are still too self-contained, too green, too selfish, too damp....What helps change this is precisely the tension in our lives. In carrying tension, we come to kindling temperature and are made ready for love....

The sublime has to be waited for. Only when there is first enough heat will there be unity. To give birth to what's divine requires the slow patience of gestation. In shorthand, that's the algebra of Advent.

RONALD ROLHEISER, OMI



Introduction

“PEACE BE WITH YOU.” These are Bishop Fulton J. Sheen’s familiar opening words to many of his television and radio broadcasts. For Bishop Sheen, the concept of inner peace was a central one to his approach to spreading God’s Word. The following quotation sums up Bishop Sheen’s message about peace:

Inner peace can be won only by making God the ruler of *all* that we do. Many people who believe in God refuse to go this far: they keep Him in a small compartment of their minds. Their plans are laid without consulting Him; their trials and sufferings are endured...and their days are passed in loneliness and weariness, although each hour might have been filled with sweetness.

To such hearts a single moment of grace may work the change. They suddenly become aware that “the Lord is in the house.” Better still, the Lord is in our hearts. They are no longer self-centered, now, but they are God-centered; outer events of their lives can no longer ruffle their peace.

This concern for the salvation of the individual—the possession of the true peace of Christ—is a theme that runs through Bishop Sheen’s entire ministry from his boyhood in Peoria, Illinois, to his days as a student for the priesthood, to his theological



training at the University of Louvain in Belgium and to his work as a widely loved radio and TV personality.

True to Sheen's vision, this companion through Advent and Christmas can be seen as a personal journey of transformation from the self-centered to the God-centered, from green logs to kindling, from outer chaos to inner peace—the same peace witnessed to by the angels of Bethlehem.

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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 Christ’s 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, one of Jesus’ first disciples. The annual commemoration of Christ’s birth begins the Christmas cycle of the liturgical year—a cycle which 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 Christ 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 Christ 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 then on Christmas Day 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 those entries that do not fit within the Advent time frame for that particular year.

Part III of this book proposes two optional formats for using each daily entry 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.

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PART I



READINGS *for*
ADVENT

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DAY

*[T]hose who wait for the LORD
shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings*

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*like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.*

ISAIAH 40:31

Waiting in Silence

God walks into your soul with silent step. God comes to you more than you go to Him. Never will his coming be what you expect, and yet never will it disappoint. The more you respond to his gentle pressure, the greater will be your freedom.

SIMPLE TRUTHS



Restore, O God, my sight, uncloset my lips, and open my soul, so that when your gracious Word is sent, I will be able to shout joyfully to you, "Come." Let the longing of this season of Advent transmute into a proper preparation for the arrival of the World's Greatest Love. Let my green self be matured and transformed into a living flame of love.

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DAY 2

*For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.*

ISAIAH 9:6

Timeless Opportunities

Time opens opportunities. When Moses led his people out of Egypt, God spoke to him: “You have been going about this mountain country long enough: turn northward.” The time of probation was paid; the time of opportunity had come. The emancipation of the slaves waited for Lincoln; the open door of Ephesus for Paul....

Though time is too precious to waste, it must never be thought that what was lost is irretrievable. Once the Divine is introduced, then comes the opportunity to make up for losses. God is the God of the second chance. Peter denied, but he had the second chance in which to become as solid as a rock. Jonah, who refused to accept a mission, was given a second chance and saved Babylon. There really is such a thing as a “second birth.” Being born again means that all that went before is not held against us.

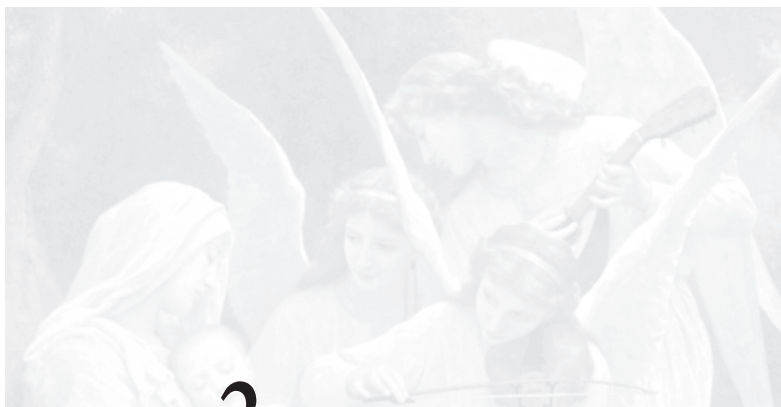
ON BEING HUMAN

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Welcome, little infant of the world, you who were God-sent to us more than two thousand years ago. Let your birth give us a fresh heart and time for second chances. Let your birth retrieve for us the opportunity to repair our sinful selves.





DAY 3

*But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.*

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Two Births, Two Bethlehems

There are two births of Christ, one unto the world in Bethlehem; the other in the soul, when it is spiritually reborn. Men think of the former much more than the later, and celebrate it every year; but the spiritual Bethlehem is equally momentous....

It was the second birth that Saint Paul insisted on when he wrote from prison to his beloved people, the Ephesians, asking that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith and that they be rooted and grounded in love. This is the second Bethlehem, or the personal relationship of the individual heart to the Lord Christ.



REJOICE

Jesus, may I be just as willing and determined to follow the road of the second Bethlehem, as Mary and Joseph were to set off on their journey to the first Bethlehem. Let me recognize that Advent is not just a sentimental exercise but a true journey of conversion. May this Advent occasion your rebirth and rootedness in my heart in both faith and love.

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DAY 4

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,

the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of counsel and might,

the spirit of knowledge and the

fear of the LORD....

The wolf shall live with the lamb,

the leopard shall lie down with the kid,

the calf and the lion and the

fatling together,

and a little child shall lead them.

ISAIAH 11:1–2, 6

Death Before Life

The story of every human life begins with birth and ends with death. In the person of Christ, however, it was his death that was first and his life that was last. The Scripture describes him as “the Lamb slain as it were, from the beginning of the world.” He was slain in intention by the first sin and rebellion against God. It was not so much that his birth cast a shadow on his life and thus led to his death; it was rather that the Cross was first, and cast its shadow back to his birth. His has been the only life in the world that was ever lived backward...from the reason of his coming manifested by his name “Jesus” or “Savior” to the fulfillment of his coming, namely, his death on the Cross.

LIFE OF CHRIST



You, O Lord, are the one whose coming was foretold. We long for your birth which is newly dear each year. Let your birth find us blessed with the spirit of peace and understanding, and find the lion and the lamb in the same lair. Let the Crib and the Cross be our autobiography as well. Let these be the two symbols that shadow our lives as disciples here on earth.

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DAY 5

“Give and it will be given to you.

A good measure, pressed down,

shaken together, running over,

will be put into your lap;

for the measure you give

will be the measure you get back.”

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Gifts and Justice

You might say that it was very unjust of God to deprive us of friendship with him, and of these other gifts, simply because Adam sinned. There would have been injustice if God deprived you of your due, but you are no more entitled to be a child of God than a razor has a right to bloom, or a rose has the right to bark, or a dog has the right to quote Dante. What Adam lost was gifts, not a heritage.

On Christmas Day, when you distribute gifts to your friends, would I have a right to say to you: "Why do you not give me a gift?" You would answer: "I am not doing you an injustice, because I owe you nothing. I am not obliged to give these gifts to my friends. If I had not given them gifts, I would not have deprived them of anything I owed them." So, neither did God owe us anything beyond our nature as a creature of his handiwork.



PREFACE TO RELIGION

Lord, as I gather my offerings in thanksgiving for the gift of your Beloved Son, let me remember the needs of those for whom my gifts are an obligatory duty, not an act of mere generosity. Grant me the grace to give to those in need always, not just during this season of the year. Above all, inspire me to give in the fullest possible measure.

