



Advent 2021, Week 1 Reflection

Unveiling Hope

Welcome to the Advent audio retreat, presented by Jesuit Connections and Charis Ministries. We'll provide a short audio reflection on a theme or liturgical reading from each week in Advent. May these clips deepen our personal and collective preparation for Christmas. And so, let's pause for the next several minutes, take a deep breath, and enter intentionally into the First Week of Advent as we seek to "Unveil Hope..."

This week's Gospel feels like a pretty jarring way to begin the hopeful season of Advent. We hear of "imminent tribulations" and warnings of people who will "die of fright in anticipation of what is coming." Yikes. I don't know about you, but that wasn't exactly the warm and fuzzy beginning of Advent I was looking for after spending more than a year and a half living in a time of pandemic.



["At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. \(Luke 21:27 NIV\)" by curt_ferrell is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.](#)

This is the type of reading I've admittedly struggled with in the past, and especially today; it all feels a little too real... the apocalyptic visions, being "caught like a trap," the need to be vigilant... It triggers thoughts of the many recent times I've felt anxious, powerless, or hyper-aware of the challenges and threats facing our world right now.

Earlier this year, I read a reflection that explained the origins of the word "apocalypse." Apparently, "apocalypse" doesn't mean "end of times" like I originally thought, but rather "unveiling." As someone whose career is dedicated to working with words, I was surprised I never knew this! I suppose it makes an apocalyptic reading like this week's Gospel passage seem a little less scary. Since then, I've been meditating on the term "unveiling" and thinking more about what's been revealed to me during this past year.

For me, what has been unveiled is the need to nurture relationships with those I love. To take care of my mental health by giving myself permission to both feel my feelings and seek help when I need to. To communicate clearly and effectively at work and with my spouse. To eat good and nutritious food. To remember that I'm resilient and can do hard things and will be OK in the face of change. To be present in prayer. To give myself time to rest and reflect. To remember that God is in control.

Difficult times like these remove our blinders and help us realize what is actually true and necessary and lasting. That's probably not a long list, but I'd guess God is at the top of it.

So, what does this mean for our Advent journeys? Perhaps it's a reminder not to get so "caught up" with the Christmas-related things it's so easy to get caught up with — shopping for everyone on your list, making lots of plans, scrambling to get the decorations up and the menu together. Or maybe it's a reminder that there's always more going on with God's plan than we could ever know. But by being vigilant and paying attention to what God might be inviting us to do this season, we may see an opportunity to grow close to God's son, the great Hope who makes all things new.

As with all endings (even apocalyptic ones!), there is an opportunity for a new beginning. After all, Advent is the "new year" of our Church! I don't know about you, but I'm ready to leave this year behind me. Armed with a renewed sense of perspective, I'm ready to accept my invitation to a deeper understanding of our world and my place in it and move forward in hope. I'm ready to prepare my heart for the infant Jesus and see what else might be unveiled along the way.

This reflection was written by Jennifer Sawyer, a 2016 alum of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program in New York City. We look forward to spending our Advent season together as we prepare intentionally for Christmas. We hope this audio retreat stokes the fires of your daily contemplation. Join us next week when we'll explore the theme, "Peace in Suffering." From all of us at the Ignatian Young Adult Ministries, thanks for listening.

Reflection questions:

- *What has been "unveiled" or revealed to you this year?*
- *What might God be inviting you to reflect on or respond to this Advent?*
- *Invite God to be with you as you ponder a tribulation of the past year and anticipate what is to come. How does your understanding shift?*