

From the Council President

I started watching Christmas movies in early November this year. You know the cheesy ones you can find on the Hallmark Channel and Netflix? I have even been caught singing a Christmas carol or two. I have also contemplated putting up the Christmas tree - wait for it - before Thanksgiving! (gasp) I know, I know! As Lutherans, before we celebrate Christmas, we observe the season of Advent as a time to reflect and prepare our hearts for Christmas. The word "Advent" comes from Latin meaning "to come," and so during Advent, God invites us to focus on our faith as we wait for the coming of the newborn Savior.

But what about when the waiting just feels like too much? Even under the most ordinary circumstances, waiting is hard. And sometimes it is downright impossible. This year in particular, I am ready for some of the peace and joy that the Christmas season can bring. I am eager to focus on the things that make me feel warm and happy, instead of the anxiety and uncertainty that have permeated our everyday lives for the last 9 months. I am desperate for some normalcy, to be with family and friends again. I pray for my children to be able to return to school and hug their grandparents without worrying about spreading a potentially life-threatening virus. And I long for a time when we can all worship and attend Bible studies, Sunday School classes, and outreach events together.

As we wait for the day we can safely gather again, can we learn from our Advent journey how to navigate this enduring time apart? Gertrud Mueller Nelson explains in her article "Wait, it's Advent" in *Living Lutheran*,

"A big chunk of one's spiritual life is learning to have confidence in the darkness of winter, in times when things look bleak, to know that there is something out of our sight that is coming into being. Advent is one time in the year when the church says, 'Waiting may be difficult, but we have to wait, so let's wait together.'

And so, in the darkest time of the year, we wait with longing for the slow return of light."

And though we cannot be fully together during this time, we know that:

The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple,

the church is not a resting place, the church is a people.

I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together!

All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together!

And so, as we long for the joy and merriment the Christ Child brings at Christmas, and as we expectantly await the day we can all be together again, let us be the church together. Not as a group gathered in a building, but as the body of Christ shining a light through this dark time, as we all await the slow return of light.

In Christ,

Jen Fisher