

Away from Ordinary Time

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

There is no Advent as short as those that come in the years like this, when Christmas falls on a Monday. When the fourth Sunday of Advent is also Christmas Eve, there seems to be – and, indeed, there is -- almost an entire week missing from this season of anticipation.

The child I once was would be delighted by this. In those early years of my life, Advent always seemed painfully long. In years gone by it felt as though an eternity lay between the Sunday the first candle was lit on the Advent wreath until that last, final candle announced that the wonder of Christmas Eve was almost, finally, at hand.

Today, however, Advent seems painfully short. As an adult, there is now so much to be done in preparation for Christmas, and so little time in which to do it. Navigating December's flurry of final exams, events with family and friends, community celebrations, and cherished traditions while trying to prepare a heart and soul for Christmas can feel overwhelming any year. But, with Advent compressed into twenty-one days, it is especially daunting this year.

However, this challenge of Advent 2023 may also be an opportunity. It may be an opportunity, certainly, to let go of those things that are not essential or important. But it may also be an opportunity to give more thought to the days that *follow* Christmas, rather than only the days that *precede* it.

Every year, I am told that the Christmas season begins rather than ends on Christmas day. I understand that and know it to be true. I know that Ordinary Time does not return until January 9, after the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Because I take down my Christmas tree with less excitement than I put it up, when late January comes around and it is not yet back in its box, I can pretend that I am not lazily procrastinating. I am merely waiting until the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 2nd.

Yet, even if I tell myself that Christmas does not end on Christmas, I see Christmas trees on the curb the day after Christmas. On December 26, Christmas songs leave the radio – even though they have been the soundtrack of our days since long before Halloween. Christmas decorations are drastically discounted, with the not-too-subtle message that it is time to move along. When morning dawns the day after Christmas, I still feel a bit of the pang I felt as a child when I thought that the celebration was finished.

Maybe, though, 2023 is the year to more fully appreciate those days after Christmas as what they are intended to be. Maybe this is the year to move to the days that follow

Christmas some of the joyous traditions and gatherings that cannot be – or should not be – crammed into the next three weeks.

Maybe this is the year to look to the dark days that follow Christmas with the same eyes as the Church. We might see in that season many days in which our celebrations, truncated a bit by a short Advent, can be extended for a few more weeks after Christmas.

Maybe this is the year to host a celebration on the Feast of the Epiphany rather than rush to host before Christmas. Maybe that favorite family dessert that cannot be baked before Christmas can be a special treat on the Feast of the Holy Family. Maybe parish events staffed by volunteers busy planning their family Christmas celebrations can brighten parish calendars in a burst of joy in the Christmas season rather than in Advent.

Maybe even the quiet prayer time that was so hard to come by in Advent waits for us in the octave of Christmas.

I hope that this Advent, short as it is, is a happy and holy one. But I also hope that when it passes, all the many days of Christmas are happy and holy too. Like the child I once was, I hope to cherish that season away from ordinary times.

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