

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

### **Advent, What Are We Waiting For?**

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Hi. My name is Brother Casey Cole. I'm a Franciscan Friar and the founder of Breaking In The Habit Media, a mission of evangelization and catechesis through social media. Over the next 4 weeks on this retreat, we'll be looking at the readings at our Sunday liturgy; looking at what our church has prepared for us, so that we may prepare for the great celebration of Christmas. I hope that you'll join me in reading, praying, and studying these readings each and every week, so that we may not be just hearers of the word, but doers of the word. And so let us begin in prayer.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus Christ, You came to be like us so that we might become like You. You took on all that we experience but sin, teaching us and showing us the way, offering us a path to communion with You and The Trinity. We pray that as we prepare for the celebration of Christmas, we may follow Your example, we may listen to Your word, and that we may truly become more like You. In Your name we pray. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

As a child, there is no greater day in the entire world than Christmas morning. Oh, Christmas morning as a seven-year-old. The presents, the cookies, the Christmas music, all the beautiful decorations. It's the sort of thing that you look forward to all year. What an amazing day. And honestly, it doesn't matter if it's the same every year. In our family it mostly was - there was very little surprise as to what would happen, and yet it was still amazing. We would wake up very early in the morning - 7 o'clock was the earliest we were allowed to wake my parents up. Not a minute earlier, not a minute later, we would barge into their room and wake them up. "It's Christmas! It's Christmas! Let's open presents!"

And they would get up, and they would tell us to wait at the top of the stairs, and they would go downstairs and start making some tea, they'd start eating some cookies and making breakfast, and they would get the camera and we would finally be allowed to come downstairs. And we'd run downstairs with great joy and absolute excitement, and we'd look at the tree with awe, and we'd run to our presents. And one-by-one we would hand out the presents, and we were allowed to open one at a time and take it slowly and watch what other people opened, and it was amazing. There was the thing that we were waiting for. And afterwards, we would get to play with our toys while we ate breakfast and listened to Christmas music, just relax along the day with family, and just had a wonderful day.

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It was the same almost every year, and so you knew what to expect. It was really no surprise. Even, in fact, the gifts were not much of a surprise. While my parents were very creative and wonderfully generous and getting us things that we didn't expect, for the most part they knew what we wanted because we kind of told them what we wanted. And so, for us, Christmas morning wasn't a matter of if we would get that one toy we'd been looking at all year, but when we would get it. We knew that our parents would get it, we knew that they were generous, and we didn't ask for crazy things. And so it was just a matter of waiting.

And ugh, when you're 7 years old, waiting is unbearable, especially when you see the signs of Christmas all around you. The weather would get a little colder and the leaves would fall, the wreaths would go up, we'd get a tree, the Christmas lights. You just knew we were getting closer and closer. The Advent wreath, the Advent calendar. How amazing it was to know we were getting one step closer. And yet how trying it was on our patience. We just want that present. We know it's somewhere hidden in the house. We just want it now. And then Christmas morning would come, and we would open up our presents, and there it was. What great joy, what great exaltation. The moment had finally come. We could rejoice.

As a child, you knew exactly what you were waiting for. As adults, we don't always know what we're waiting for. The season has a different feel for us because we're not exactly waiting for that new Gameboy, or the Barbie, or the G. I. Joe. And we ask ourselves "What are we waiting for in this season?" It can often be a season to see family, to be with our kids, to have a good time, but it doesn't quite have that spark like it used to. "What are we waiting for?" As adults, we can be mature a little bit, have the religious answer, and we say "Of course. Well, we're waiting for Jesus. Jesus is the reason for the season, right? Put Christ back in Christmas."

And of course that makes perfect sense. Here we have the incarnation, arguably the greatest moment in human history. The creator of the entire universe, the almighty God came to be the created, came to be of time and space, came to walk humbly among us, so that we could be like that God. How amazing this moment is in history, to see this vulnerable God, this God coming as a baby, like us. How amazing it is to know that we have a connection with God. And so of course we celebrate the incarnation, and yes, Christmas is about Jesus.

But it makes me wonder: what does that even mean? Jesus has already come, hasn't He? This was a moment 2,000 years ago, and so when we say that we're waiting for Jesus, what do we actually mean? Is it simply Jesus' birthday? Is it simply a nice memory? A remembrance of something that happened long ago? If that's the case, well, that's nice, and that's wonderful, and we should celebrate it,

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but what makes December 24<sup>th</sup> different from December 26<sup>th</sup>? Is there any difference in our lives? Do we actually wait for something that's in the future, or is it all in the past? Because I might be crazy, but I don't think Jesus goes and hides for a month during advent. I don't think He goes away. We still have the Eucharist, we still have prayer, He's still present among us. So what are we waiting for at Christmas? As adults, what do we hope for?

When we look at our readings for Advent, particularly this first week of Advent, I think the picture becomes a little clearer. When we look at these readings, we don't see anything about a birth. There is no baby Jesus in a manger, there's no donkey or ox, there's no pregnant Mary, no Joseph accompanying her, no shepherds or magi. The story is not there. In fact, there's nothing about a beginner or a start anywhere in these readings. It's actually quite the opposite. When we look at our readings for this week - Jeremiah, the First Letter to the Thessalonians, the Gospel of Luke - we find a story of an ending. We see the world fading away. We see the structures around us crumbling, and in fact it's the end of times. The world is coming to an end.

And Jesus is present, and we see Him in the Gospel of Luke, but not as a baby. Not at the beginning of His life. No, Jesus is present in our gospel this week as the King of Heaven. As the one who reigns over all creation, the one who is coming to rule over heaven and earth, and to bring judgment and redemption. This is the story of the end. And when we read these readings, we get a very different picture of what we're waiting for here in the season of Advent. Because we're not waiting for Jesus' first coming, we're waiting for His second coming. That coming at the end of time where all hope will be restored, all injustice will be put away, when the kingdom of God that we hear about in the prophets will be realized, and there will be nothing but joy and exaltation. This is what we hope for. This is what we await with all of our hearts and beings: that time when Jesus will reign.

And it's difficult, because when we look out into the world, we know that that is not our world. We can see poverty, we can see people who are hungry and homeless, people struggling to get by. We see violence and war; we see fighting in our church and in our world, in our homes and in our politics. People not getting along. We see a world that looks nothing like what the prophets described. We see injustice and oppression, a world that we should stand against. This is not what we hope for. This is not what we wish for.

But that, that is what Christmas is about. That is what the season of Advent and preparing is about. Because we hope for something more. We hope that all of this will fade away, and we know that in fact it will. Because just like a child on Christmas morning, it's not if Jesus comes back and does all of these wonderful

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things, it's about when. Jesus has promised that He will come back. He has already come the first time, He has already given us reason to hope. And so when we say that we hope, it's not like saying "Well, I hope for pizza for dinner tonight." Or "I hope I win the lottery." It's not some unfounded wish. Our hope rests in the reality of Jesus Christ, the truth of His life, and the promise that He gave us.

And so in this way, when we say we hope in the second coming, we hope that Jesus will come again, we actually possess what we hope for. We already have it here in our midst, at least in a small sense, when we go and receive the Eucharist; when we hear the word proclaimed; when we are among the poor and forgotten that Jesus says He is with, there we are in the presence of Christ, albeit in a small sense, albeit in just a taste. It is our promise that He will come again. It is the fulfillment of our hope that we know, Christmas morning, we know at the end of times we will get exactly what we hope for.

And so it leaves us with a question: How do we prepare for that hope to be fulfilled? What do we do over the next 4 weeks? Well, I think we start to imitate Jesus a little bit more seriously. I think we look at the world that He wants us to live in, the world that He is going to bring, and we need to look around our world and say "What can we change?" Because we are not simply sitting here passively waiting for something to happen. Christ lives in us. Christ has given us a commission to go and proclaim the word to the whole world. To baptize, to preach, to make holy the world around us.

When Christ lives in us we are holy, and we can make the whole world holy, and we can experience that in breaking of the Kingdom of Heaven, that small taste of the second coming, so that we can prepare this world for Him to come again. We know that He came as a baby 2,000 years ago, and we celebrate that wonderful, wonderful moment, but we also know that He's coming again. And so we must prepare. Prepare our hearts, prepare our minds, but of course prepare our world so that it may be ready for Him. We end with a prayer.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus Christ, what a wonderful gift that You have already given us. We already possess the fulfillment of our hope. You are already among us, and now it is simply a matter of waiting. Not a matter of if, but when. And so we pray, Lord, that on that day we may be ready, that our world may be ready, and that until then we may do everything in our power to love You, and to love God's people through You. That we may truly become more like You in everything we do. In Your name we pray. Amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

May the grace and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you as we celebrate this season of Advent.

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