

## Is Your Alarm Set?

Did you set an alarm this morning? How about flipping a light switch or pushing the “on” button on a coffee pot? Each day we do a great number of things based on what we expect will result. Most often these expectations come to be, though we all know the frustration of something not working.

Advent, sometimes called a season of waiting, is also a season of preparation, and as with all preparing, how we prepare is based on what we are expecting. What are you expecting to happen on or around December 25<sup>th</sup>? What do you expect of God – what is God expecting of us?

In her wonderful little book, *When the Heart Waits*, Sue Monk Kidd tells of visiting a monastery sometime around Christmas. She recalls walking past a monk outside the church and greeting him with the traditional, “Merry Christmas,” to which the monk replied: “May Christ be born in you.” This greeting stuck with her, causing her to look at the Advent season not as a time of waiting for the Christ child, but as a season of expectantly waiting for Christ, God’s spirit, to be born or born anew in her heart and life. What power, what changes might lay ahead if we invited the Christmas Story to become our story, if we were to hear and embrace the expectation that the Kingdom of God has come and can come more fully into each life and all of creation.

By our faith, we are called to life with our feet in two worlds. We live and breathe earthly lives, with all the physical, emotional and temporal aspects and expectations such life brings. Yet we also are citizens of God’s Kingdom, which exists in, around, throughout, and often in spite of our earthly living. The kingdom of God is and will be a kingdom of peace and justice. The call to anticipate that in our lives means to love and seek out others. The kingdom is not one of exclusion, but of inclusion; not one of revenge, but compassion; not one of justice alone, but justice tempered with mercy.

This also applies to our political and economic worlds. The justice of the kingdom which Advent calls us to anticipate can turn many aspects of our modern society upside down. It demands a striving for human and civil rights based on the idea of divinely-ordained human dignity. It means being mindful of actions and systems to see that the impact on any human life takes priority over economic and other considerations. It means a just distribution of the world’s resources. It means the phrase “may Christmas come for everyone” must be more than something we sing; it must be something we believe can become reality and that it is dependent upon our willingness to refuse to settle for less. On a local and personal level for Christ to be born in us may mean grappling with and

finding ways to say "this is enough for me, I have no need, let me share of my abundance."

It may mean developing a discipline of self-examination, measuring how often we live life as reflected in Scripture and in Christ. Four hundred years before Jesus, Socrates said: "The unexamined life is not worth living." He was on trial for heresy because he encouraged his students to challenge the accepted beliefs of the time and think for themselves. Each time we celebrate Christmas, Christ challenges us to examine the expectations that have been set for us by a fear-driven society polluted by consumerism. There is a better way, and that is what Immanuel, God with us, is all about. Expecting Christ to be born in us as an ever growing reality, is the real essence of transformation, and how dearly we need to expect and embrace transformation!

Our Bible readings for today focus on the very human desire to know what to expect in regards to the end of life, yet they call us to focus our expectations instead on life, on living with Christ born in us, on living in such radical ways that transformation happens not only in us but in the whole of creation.

Let us prepare by acknowledging the power of expectations, and of what God expects of us. Coming to the table is a grace-filled opportunity for such examination. What do you expect as you come, receive and return? What does God expect to be the outcome of the blessing, breaking and receiving of these elements which become for us the body and blood of Christ? Let us open our hearts not to our expectations but to God.