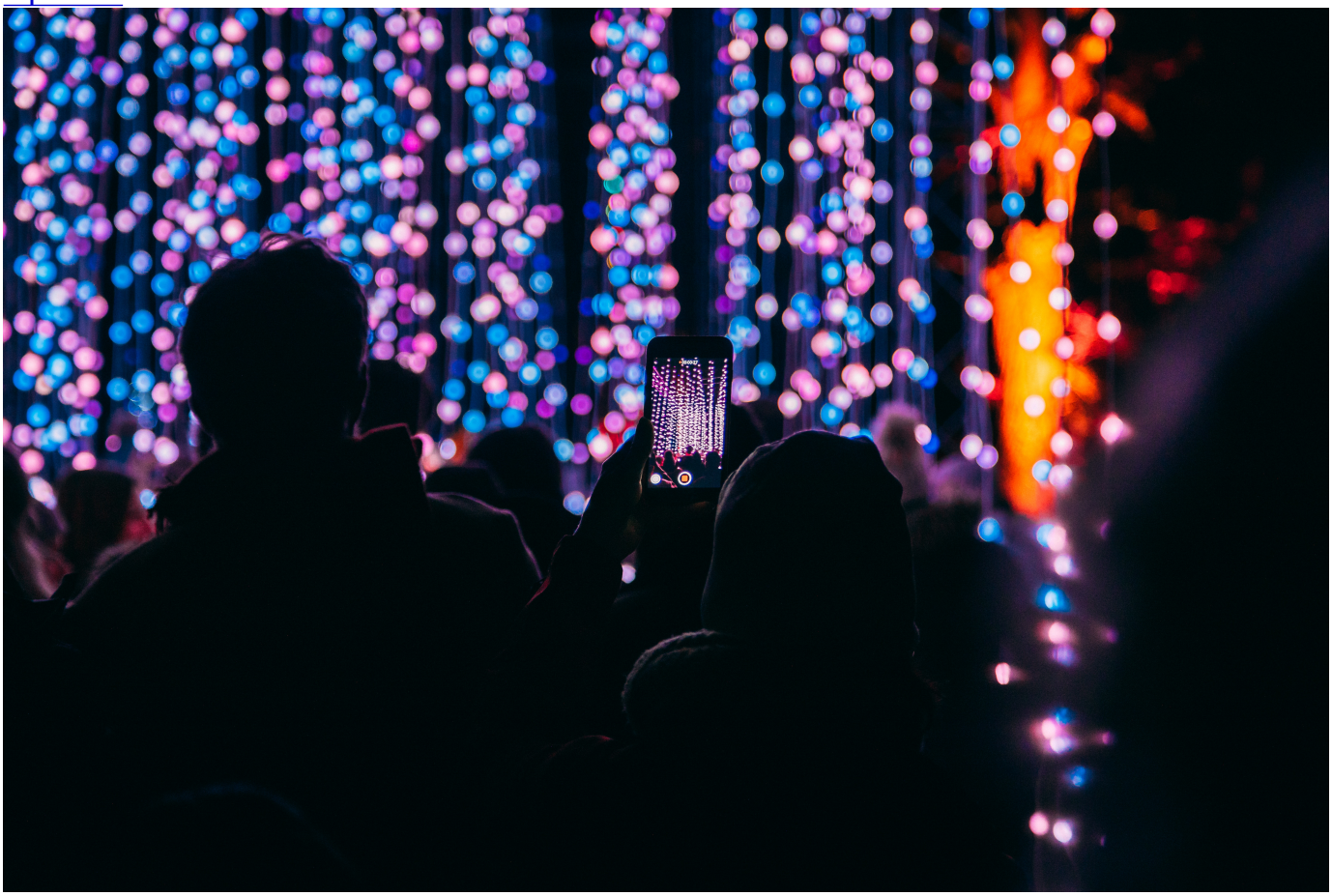
Opinion



(Unsplash/James Baldwin)



by Mary Ann McGivern

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Advent is about time. It is the start of the liturgical year. It is about waiting for the celebration of Jesus' birth, his first coming, with midnight Mass and presents. Advent is also about experiencing the moment of Jesus' presence now. And it is about Jesus' coming at our own deaths; it is about Jesus' final coming.

This year I'm startled that decorations seem to be up a week or so earlier than past years. It's as if everybody said together, "Light up the night with brilliant color. Say no to fear and darkness." The decorations are a communal decision to live in the present moment, to savor "now." We are not waiting for some future joy. We are here, lighting up the night sky.

As I say, experience the present moment is as legitimate way as any to participate in Advent. The time is now.

I have a friend, released from prison now, but years ago he was denied parole when he had allowed himself to expect it. I didn't hear from him for six months. He said he had to learn again, in his bitter disappointment, how to do time.

How does a person do time? We spend time, waste time, kill time. But to "do time" is really to live in the present moment, accepting monotony, fear, ugliness and even joy without allowing the self to look beyond the present moment. There's no place for the imagination in prison.

Advent isn't prison. It's arrival. T.S. Lewis says "the end of our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." Advent is recognition.

The bright decorations, like the prisoner's laser focus on now, deny danger and rejection. That's human. We all deny what is too big for us to take in to our consciousness. And Jesus Himself is too big for our understanding. But if we think about arriving at the place where we started, perhaps we can sink a little more deeply into this Advent season, our arrival at this moment in time.

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