

[Spirituality](#)

[Pencil Preaching](#)



by Pat Marrin

[View Author Profile](#)

patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

December 23, 2019

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)



“In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us”
(Luke 1:79)

2 Sam 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16; Luke 1:47-79

Grayson Warren Brown, the renowned liturgical composer, once described the anticipatory build-up celebrants in black churches had mastered to prepare their congregations for worship. The call to prayer begins with organ music and scriptural prompts to let people know that God is on his way. This is then heightened to signal that God is getting closer, eliciting cries of thanksgiving. Then God is at the door and the people are on their feet. Finally, God is present and glorious in their midst, and the congregation explodes in song and hand-clapping praise

Today’s readings on the eve of Christmas invite us to feel this same eagerness. We are reminded that David was promised that his house would stand forever and that a mighty savior would spring from his line. Zechariah, his tongue released, breaks forth into a canticle of praise at the imminent arrival of God’s messenger, coming like the dawn of a new day after a long night of anxious waiting and watching.

In simpler times, and perhaps more in memory than reality, Christmas taught children the power of deep anticipation that sharpened their focus on what the next morning might bring, a special gift, the arrival of a beloved family member, or the inexplicable feeling of awe to be part of a faith community gathering to sing, light candles and tell wonderful stories in the middle of the night.

Pope Francis has sought to renew the experience of faith as more than assent to sacred truth, but as an encounter with the God of surprises. When God comes, we do not know and cannot control the stirring of grace and its consequences in our lives. Will we be utterly changed, or opened wide to some revelation that asks us to be bigger than we have ever been before, or to take a new direction we never would have imagined?

Advent has introduced us to a luminous cloud of witnesses who experienced just this: a barren, elderly couple suddenly expecting a child, a prophet who announces a messiah he then doubts, a young girl asked to conceive the Son of God, a troubled spouse told in a dream to take her home as his wife.

The spirit of Christmas tells us to expect the unexpected, to be open to adventure and new relationships, daily parables that will stretch our vision and show us how to respond to others in new ways. Something wonderful is about to happen to us, because without knowing it, this is what we have been praying for during Advent. We want and need a new dawn, a new birth in hope. This is the promise of Christmas and the joy of the Gospel.

Advertisement