

*In All Creation Waits: The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings*, author Gayle Boss explores the roots of Advent and how our faith is connected to creation and its cycles. She reflects on early agricultural societies, “who celebrated the harvest with gratitude yet felt unease as the days grew darker. Though their stored provisions promised survival, the retreating sun and creeping cold stirred a primal fear. Despite their collective memory that spring would return, they could not escape a sense of vulnerability.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, on the first Sunday of Advent, we feel echoes of that same unease. December darkness lingers longer, and the air grows colder. While our modern understanding assures us that daylight will lengthen again in just three weeks, after the winter solstice, our bodies may still sense discomfort as light—and life—seem to slip away. We are reminded of what we cannot control, that we are at the mercy of the rhythms of God’s creation, a humbling reality.

Though the holidays bring social connection and celebration, many feel a heaviness as the days grow shorter—a discomfort we might not fully understand. In a world proclaiming, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year,” we can still experience unease, echoing the ancient fear of darkness and endings.

The early Church Fathers called this season *adventus*—a coming. They saw the diminishing light and the life it sustained as a foreshadowing of the ultimate end of life as we know it, Urging believers to prepare through fasting, giving, and prayer; they hoped they would find the strength and courage to go on in faith. Advent, for them, was a time for remembering that God, who creates all life, is with us, especially in times of fear and uncertainty.<sup>2</sup>

In today’s Gospel from Luke, Jesus speaks to his disciples of a coming darkness, describing in detail the chaos and fear of the end times. His words evoke anxiety, yet his intention is not to terrify, but to prepare. Jesus urges them to pay attention, to be ready—not with dread, but with faith, so that when they see the signs, they can stand up, raise their heads, and trust that their redemption is near. Calling upon the imagery of leaves that burst forth in spring, Jesus affirms that for those who believe, new life will emerge. His words remind us that God’s rhythm of renewal is woven into creation itself, and darkness is never the final word.

Yes, life can be hard, and darkness can feel overwhelming. Jesus doesn’t deny this reality, but instead points us to God, who has come, is and always will be with us, and

God's intention to set the world right, not through an avoidance of pain, but through our transformation and renewal.

As the lushness of the natural world falls away, it's easy to feel stripped bare of life's signs. Advent invites us to honor these sacred rhythms and to lean into the invitation to turn inward, to practice *waiting, wondering, and trusting*. By modeling Jesus' example we are better able to connect with the deep, pulsing rhythms of life in creation and those within ourselves.

So, where might this Advent journey take you?

You know the birth we will celebrate, the Savior we will honor. You also know your deep need for God's grace and for the assurance that salvation awaits you beyond today's challenges. Yet, in our human tendency to get caught up and consumed by the present moment, Advent is like a wake-up call — pulling us out of our slumber, and reminding us to take notice of Jesus' presence in and around us. Because, it is his presence that gives us strength to endure and to hold on to hope.

Jesus knows we cannot navigate life's disruptions and difficulties by ourselves. Even as we anticipate his final return, He breaks in to sustain us here and now. Jesus beckons us to lean into the sacred mystery: *to trust that death always opens to new beginnings, and that Christ's light shines even in the deepest darkness*. In Romans 8, Paul assures us that nothing in all of creation—not even the darkness—can separate us from God's love in Christ. Our Advent invitation is to lean into the mystery of trusting. What might we discover if we dare to trust in God's seasons, God's rhythms, God's return?

In *All Creation Waits*<sup>3</sup>, Boss offers a powerful image in her story of a painted turtle. "During the warmer months, the turtle basks in the sun's light and warmth. But as the water cools in autumn, an ancient instinct calls her to prepare for the coming cold. She slips from her log into the pond's bottom muck, where she buries herself in darkness.

Encased in mud, her body slows almost to stillness. Her heart barely beats, and her body temperature drops just short of freezing. Beneath layers of ice and snow, she enters a deep stillness where she does not breathe. She waits, though the waiting is not easy.

Oxygen depletion stresses her body, and lactic acid builds in her bloodstream, causing her muscles to burn. To survive, her body slowly draws calcium from her shell, dissolving her very structure to neutralize the acid. Movement would require oxygen she does not have, so she remains still, focused on a quiet, unwavering trust: that the world will warm again, and with it, her life."

This radical simplicity, this act of surrender, is what saves her. In her deep stillness is a trust she doesn't name, but that we might name faith—a faith and trust that life will return.

Jesus calls us to a similar stillness and trust. He asks us to lean into the darkness we fear, not with despair, but with the assurance that God's light is ever-present. As John 1:5 proclaims, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Advent is our opportunity to settle into this trust, to embrace the mystery of waiting, and to discover the treasures God reveals in the stillness. This season, as the world proclaims joy and light, let us also acknowledge the darkness—not as something to fear, but as *a place where God's presence meets us*. In the slowing and stillness of Advent, may we find hope, peace, and the promise that God is with us, always creating, always renewing.

May we trust in this rhythm, lean into the waiting, and embrace the sacred mystery of God's coming among us.