

Devotional for Sunday After Christmas

From "Bless the Advent We Actually Have" by Kate Bowler & the Everything Happens Project.
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God With Us

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

—JOHN 1:1-5 (NRSVUE)

In this community, we talk a lot about before and afters. There is a life *before*. In the Before Times, jokes might have come easily and you might be quick to laugh. A time when it felt easy to make plans far off in the future and hope was easy to come by. And there is a life *after*. Which might be what you are experiencing today.

The first Christmas since the divorce or after the kids started their own family traditions. The first Christmas with one less stocking to fill, or perhaps realizing the perfect gift didn't actually fix the broken relationship. Your house may be lacking the joy (or people) you had hoped for. Maybe today you woke up and decided to go back to sleep because living in the *after* is hard work (we understand and we are so sorry). No matter what you are experiencing, today, we also recognize a different before and after.

Advent is a season of divine anticipation. A *before* marked by waiting with bated breath for Jesus to be born, for the world to be made right. And Christmas is the ultimate *after*. One marked by realized joy and celebration. As we finally place baby Jesus in our nativity scenes and light the Christ candle on our Advent wreaths, we are reminded that Jesus' birth means that God is with us, the Emmanuel.

God is with us in our before and afters. *God is with us* in our pain and joy. *God is with us* during our beginnings and endings. *God is with us* when we find the courage to hope for a bigger story even in our own impossible situations. *God is with us* when we are surprised by the joy that embraces our sorrow and loss. *God is with us* when we feel a peace that passes all understanding, even when our lives have come undone. *God is with us* even when our circumstances don't change. *God is with us* when we realize God's love for us, so much that God sent Jesus to us.

The best news is that the love, peace, joy, and hope that comes with God's presence doesn't have to end. It can't be boxed up and put in storage until next year. We can practice recognizing, embracing, and looking for the presence of God throughout the year. For our God is always with us from this day until the end.

This is the day we've been waiting for. Let us rejoice.

REFLECT

- 1- Name one person who has stood alongside you in both the before and the after. How does their presence impact your confidence in God being with you?

BLESSING From *The Lives We Actually Have* (p. 224)

Our God who set the world spinning should come down for this one reason: to love us into a newness. Not for gain, nor our capitalist fantasies, but the hope that freely, lavishly, that we might learn to see, feel, and live Christ's love. Thank you. Christ the Giver & the Gift.

LISTEN

NT Wright and Kate had a rich discussion about how God works with us through the hard things in life.

<https://youtu.be/e7LiwHnlojM?si=yOEvwLQJA60vkKPv> (5 min).

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