

Here comes the parade

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Last Saturday was a stay-at-home-and-read-a-book-with-a-cup-of-something-warm-in-your-hands sort of day. It was the kind of damp cold that goes straight to your bones and chills your toes so that they don't get warm for the rest of the day. It was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a good parade-watching day.

And yet, there we were, lined up outside the library on Church Street, umbrellas in hand, peering down the street and waiting for the sirens to indicate that the parade had started. This is what you do, apparently, when your daughter is walking with her Girl Scout troop in the parade: you get out of your warm slipper socks and don your raincoat so that you can jump up and down and wave emphatically for the five seconds it takes for her to walk by and grin at you.

Just before the parade started the rain turned to a drizzle, more annoying than drenching but still unpleasant. Up and down the street there were parents and families and the hardiest of holiday revelers, all huddled together for warmth under the gray, oppressive sky.

What are we doing here? I thought to myself. We should have all agreed to stay home in bed. It didn't seem possible that anything cheerful could happen on a day so damp and dark.

But then the parade rounded the corner, and the drums tapped out their cadence and the trumpet fanfare sounded. The baton twirlers twirled and the parents cheered and the kids grinned and the dancers danced as if the sky were blue. And it occurred to me that Advent is a little like waiting for a parade in the rain.

These December days just keep getting darker and darker. The world seems to be swirling ever deeper into chaos, injustice, and terror. And yet, we keep lighting those Advent candles each week. We keep proclaiming that the light is coming, all evidence to the contrary. And then it does: the light comes, sometimes slipping quietly around the corner without much warning, sometimes blasting into our lives with all the fanfare of a big brass band.

We wait and we watch, and when we see it, we cheer as loudly as we can.