

Ready for Advent

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [November 29, 2011](#) issue



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Advent is my favorite season. I think this goes back to the anticipation of school after endless summers, to the joy of fall reunions with college friends, and to my own children's excitement at the first day of school. I love autumn—the leaves turning to red, yellow and orange, the days becoming shorter, the color of the sky and clouds in the gorgeous, slanted fall light. As a boy, I looked forward to darkness at 5 p.m. and to returning home to the cozy warmth of home lights after I had finished the evening paper route.

I'm particularly ready and eager for Advent this year. Perhaps it's because recent world events have been so relentlessly grim: another fatal exchange of rocket fire between Israelis and Palestinians, a car bomb attack on American troops in Afghanistan, more suicide bombs in Iraq, fragile economies in Europe and here at home, and presidential candidates outdoing one another in ignoring the critical issues of immigration, financial regulation and global warming. I need Advent.

This year, I'm winding down my ministry as I prepare for retirement (I will continue as editor/publisher of the *Century*). I vowed not to get caught up in thinking "this is the last time for All Saints Sunday," etc., but I have found it hard not to. As Abraham Maslow observed after he'd had a heart attack, we would not love passionately if we thought we'd live forever. "My river never looked so beautiful," he said. For me this year, everything is more beautiful, more true.

I hear the profound yearning in Isaiah's poetry: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down," and the hope: "'Comfort, O comfort my people,' says your God. 'Speak tenderly . . .'"

This Advent season plays out against the backdrop of a materialist culture at its gaudiest, most materialistic, most vulgar; the season's advertising will appeal to the least attractive human characteristics—greed and pride and our need to affirm ourself by what we buy and consume.

Advent responds by reminding us that a child will be born in the midst of a world and a time very much like our own, that the reconciliation and redemption his birth promises is not separate from the world, and that he will call us to follow him and be his people in this same sad, greedy, vulgar and beautiful world. His birth, which dark Advent anticipates, will be a light in the darkness that darkness will not overcome.