

God is starting to show

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Usually an upcoming birth doesn't start to show till the end of the first trimester. Before that, the life in us is so small that it creates no bulges. Many women can wear their regular clothes and get their regular sleep, give or take a few gastrointestinal disturbances.

Then comes the bulge, the ballooning, the sense of no longer being one's own person, the sense that something important is happening within us. We find people staring at our bellies. The bulge has locked into place; it is attaching itself firmly to us.

Advent is the season of the showing, and God is starting to show. We light one candle to indicate the coming of a new kind of light. We see the bulge in our hearts, and we know things are different. Sometimes we even say, "This year will be different," not knowing exactly what we mean besides the sure knowledge of growth in us.

We want God's spirit to firmly attach to us, and we know it will have to move slowly-- otherwise we will be much too scared. One candle each week is about the right pace to comprehend the matter.

At the core of our Christian faith is the Holy Spirit having mysterious relations with a girl. This core mystery results in a child who is understood to be the salvation of the world. Advent is the time when we get on the path of understanding what Mary wonders: "How can these things be?" How come God comes down? How come God gets small? How come God, the eternal, becomes the temporal?

How can God be so dependent on us for care? What if we do something wrong?

In our story, power is vulnerability, heavenly is earthly, flesh involves spirit and divinity caresses the ordinary. Our God is is very hard to fathom in a world of tacky Christmas ornaments and deep concerns about Christmas-season retail performance. Our story has a quarrel with the world as we know it. It sings its song in a different key, the key of incarnation, of spirit becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

Not above us, but among us. Not outside us, but in us. Not robed in kingly crimson but in swaddling clothes in the manger next door. Not quick, but slow, slow enough not to scare us and to fully attach to us inside.