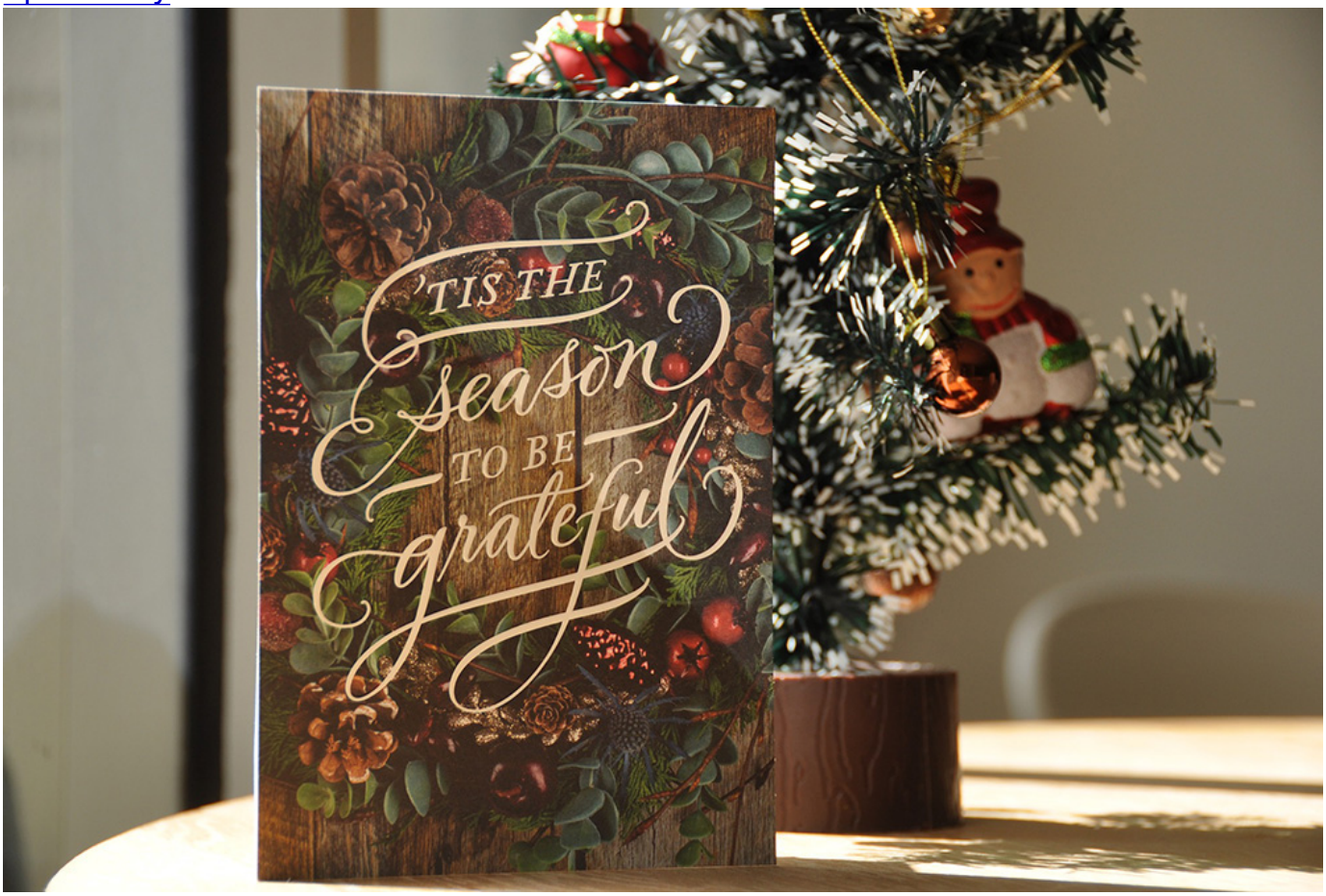
Columns
Spirituality



(Pixabay/Jenny Nguyen)



by Catherine Grasswill

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"Mommy, Daddy, is Christmas tomorrow?" the child asks his or her parents. "But no, my darling, you have to wait a few more days!"

It is so difficult to wait when you are 5 or 6 years old … but waiting is difficult not only for children! Parents who are awaiting a child; the sick who are waiting for the visit of the nurse or doctor; the elderly who see time passing without having a visit from their family or their neighbors; the homeless waiting for the opening of the door of a shelter in wintertime; refugees in a camp, waiting for food or for papers to emigrate to a welcoming, safe country, where they can begin a new life.

Waiting demands patience, patience, patience; but in our Western civilization, we have become more and more impatient. We want instant solutions to problems, we want a cure for COVID-19, right now; we want to be able to have the perfect job and to earn a good salary, even though we have little or no experience. We want to solve the climate crisis immediately, without taking the time to educate ourselves, to learn from our mistakes and be willing to do with less.

I'm not sure we have allowed ourselves to learn the lesson of patience during the pandemic, but I am certain that it is an essential lesson of life. What are some of the lessons we have learned? We are rediscovering what it means to "wait" in the lines in front of the shops and banks — we wait to buy food, and to make other necessary purchases. Perhaps we are learning to pay attention to the person behind us in line, feeling freer to engage in simple conversation.

We are rediscovering how stressed we can become as we try to enter into the gift of the present moment. On the other hand, some of us have come to know the freedom and the peace that one can experience even if we haven't much to show for our efforts — and that is OK. With the amount of air travel and road traffic drastically reduced, our soul can embrace the gift of silence; we might even become aware of the song of our feathered friends.



The birth of a day on an October morning in 2021, over a lake in Canada (Catherine Grasswill)

The world has had to stop its mad rush; we have had to slow down; to pay more attention to others; to rediscover the truth that we are not the masters of time. We discover that it is God who leads us in life, who calls us to be more attentive to the "here and now." It takes us a little while to realize that we live in an infinite universe in which we have infinite value in the eyes of God. We have more time to contemplate nature, to delight in the colors of autumn; to pass more time playing with the children and listening to the elderly.

God entered time by pitching a tent in the middle of our human lives. As the prophet Micah reminds us, it was in littleness that Jesus came: "But you, O Bethlehem … who are one of the little tribes of Judah. … [You] were wisely chosen by God to welcome the Word."

But it didn't happen in the snap of a finger, nor in the blink of an eye. It took the time of the coming, the length of time for the creation of the universe — the

galaxies, suns and planets; the time for the shaping of the Earth; the appearance of life, from protozoa to dinosaurs! It was then, no doubt, God said to Godself, "These last ones are too big; the little human race cannot develop with them."

And it took millennia for the dinosaurs to disappear and the little mammals to take over. And then it took still more time for the development of the human being, the time for them to stand up, and to spread over the planet in several species that we are still discovering. Then individuals gathered, peoples formed, civilizations developed, people tilled the soil and lived with a stability which provided opportunities for learning a language, writing and building families, and relationships. Humans discovered the fear that the gods would be the strongest and would destroy them. And they discovered war as well.

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God, little by little, fashioned the people — the smallest of peoples — for showing how God loves humankind. That took time as well, and this people didn't understand initially how their God was so different from other gods. God chose judges and sent the prophets to prepare the people; to help them understand the true nature of God. A God, who is love, waits patiently for the hearts of the people to be ready. God chose a time of greater stillness, as the moment to enter into the human race. It was like a small sparkle in the universe, which changed all the life of humanity. Just a: "Rejoice, Mary" and "Let it be done to me according to your word!"

God wanted to express love for us by entering human history, by being born of a human, the Virgin Mary, and being cared for by a father, Joseph, who loved him tenderly. Even this took time: the time of waiting — nine months — for the child to develop in his mother's womb. This child, Jesus — for that is his name — took the time that was needed to grow up, to learn a trade, to become an adult before embarking on the adventure of his human and divine vocation. And we think we can't wait a few days to celebrate his coming?

Let us take this time of Advent to realize the gift God gave us, and still gives us in Jesus the Christ; to patiently live this Advent time and celebrate a Happy Christmas in the joy of this amazing event:

"The Word was made flesh and lives among us" (John 1:14).

This story appears in the **Advent** feature series. View the full series.