

*Behold,  
I proclaim to you  
good news of  
great joy*



Reflections on Advent  
**A Child Is Born**

By Fr. Ken Sedlak, C.Ss.R.

# Incarnation

*In Jesus God  
comes to earth.  
And this divinely  
sacred presence  
happens in the  
most human  
way—a child  
is born.*



Advent is a time for reflecting on what it means for Jesus to come among us, as a human just like us. We are softened by the divine child and in this we begin to discover the divine alive within us—in all of what it means to be human.

*Our humanity  
is suffused with  
divine presence.*

**We are never  
ALONE,  
never separate.**



In Advent, our belief in the meaning of Jesus as the divine child who saves us by becoming one of us, is made intimately personal. The Savior who was born to us has been reborn within us, born in the past and reborn in the present of our flesh and blood. **The Savior we hoped for outside of our self has become our inner reality.** The astonishing revelation is that this is how our Father saves and heals us.

# Human & Divine

*Understanding  
what it means for  
Jesus to be human  
we can expand  
our identity and  
humbly accept all  
of who we are.*

Jesus is as much like us as  
we are like ourselves.

The wonder of the crib and Incarnation is that our Father saves us by pouring divinity into our humanness. The Word becomes Flesh, divinity becomes human, and the unconquerable God gives divinity into the vulnerability of our humanity.

Being human we are wounded beings, bound by fear, anger and defensive judgments. **As humans we also burst forth into creation from the very heart of God.** We are loved unconditionally and expansively into existence.



Practice Session:

## The Sacramental Imagination

Realizing that God is among us in the flesh and blood of Jesus opens our lives to the reality of God among us in all of creation. God is no longer distant from us, hunkered down in some far off heavenly kingdom. *God is right here, right now, among us, within us, present in all creation.*

Sacraments are meant to help us see the reality of “earth crammed with heaven” as part and parcel of our communal and personal life. *As Catholics we find our houses and world steeped in sacredness. For us objects, events and people in our daily lives are expressions of grace.* All creation is a revelation of Divine Presence. This often translates into a more general awareness that all creation is sacred and that Nature is our first bible.

*Our faith is not primarily a system of truths but an awareness of divine life being communicated within every aspect of our world.*

*Living within  
a sacramental  
approach to  
life helps many  
Catholics develop  
what is known as  
a “Sacramental  
Imagination.” They  
learn to perceive their  
life as packed with  
divine presence.*

Practice Session:

## The Sacramental Imagination

Love in Jesus' sense of the word is an inclusive acceptance of all God is creating as the world stage in which we are meant to play our part.

**In Advent, we can make the Sacramental imagination part of our path to developing a relationship with our Soul, with that place of Divine Presence in our lives. We begin to develop our imagination by becoming aware of the images that impact our lives**

**Here's how to start:** Take a few minutes to sit quietly, perhaps begin by reading the day's gospel, and then gently put your attention on one or more of the categories from the list on the next page.

The point is that the images that attract us are metaphorical clues that reflect our inner world and open the doors to our imaginations. The facing page offers some clues for engaging the Sacramental imagination. Write down a few adjectives or associations for each clue and see what they mirror within you. Practice this throughout Advent.

You can also use this practice to reflect on the quotations that follow in the "Mystery" section of this text and to reflect on the reflections that are displayed throughout this book in large script type.

### People

who attract us or with whom we feel uneasy, awkward or angry. They mirror parts of ourselves that are presenting themselves for integration into our personality.

### Everyday events

that seem to have a deeper meaning. They make us want to ask, "Why is this happening to me?"

### Changes

in our tastes or needs or way of living. Changes in clothing, friends, hobbies, how we spend our time, things we collect, our choice of entertainment, or a change in our sensitivity to these things.

### Words, phrases, images, stories,

slogans, songs, scenes, places to which we want to return, characters in books, plays or movies that keep coming to mind. A certain time of day; certain weather (sunny, foggy, warm, cold, changing leaves); a certain special season. These express the state of our inner world or a need for something associated with the climate.

This is deceptively simple. Once you give it a try you will begin to develop your ability to let your imagination speak to you. The most important thing is not to over-analyze these things but to play with them. Let them speak in your imagination, welcome them like a friend who has come out to bring some joy and energy to your life.

# Mystery

As we approach Christmas I'd like to offer you some poetic expressions of the Mystery, the Word of our God who can never be adequately spoken of. These are from a host of spiritual writers and poets. My hope is that you find one that nudges you into the incredible mystery of our God who has taken up residence in our hearts.

**“IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD  
AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US.  
THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, THE WORD WAS GOD.”**

John 1:1 and John 1:14

**“So long as there  
are men and  
women,  
Christ walks the  
earth as your  
neighbor,  
as the one through  
who God calls on  
you, and makes  
demands on you.”**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**“What does it profit  
me if Gabriel hails  
the virgin unless  
he brings to me  
the very self-same  
tidings.”**

Angelus Silesius

**We are talking about the birth of a child, not the revolutionary act of a strong man, not the breathtaking discovery of a sage, not the pious act of a saint. It really passes all understanding: The Birth of a child is to bring the great turning around of all things, is to bring salvation and redemption to the whole human race.**

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**“If you want,  
The Virgin will come  
walking down the road,  
Pregnant with the holy,  
and say,  
“I need shelter for the  
night,  
Please take me inside  
your heart.”**

**Then, under the roof of  
your soul,**

**You will witness the  
sublime intimacy, the  
divine, the Christ**

**Taking birth forever.”**

St. John of the Cross,  
rendered by Daniel Ladinsky  
in “Love Poems from God

*We are not human  
beings having a  
spiritual experience.  
We are spiritual beings  
having a human  
experience.*

Pierre Teilhard de  
Chardin

# The Greatest Gift

*The most profound  
mystery of our  
faith turns us to  
our humanness  
in all its  
sentimentality,  
courage,  
foolishness, joy  
and generosity.*

This is a sentimental and paradoxical time of the year. And strangely enough this is where it gets its depth.

Our Christmas celebration revolves around the child in the crib, fragile and vulnerable as well as our redeemer. The innocent child sleeps in Mary's lap while choirs of angels sing. This is how God redeems us; a child sleeping on its mother's lap.

We celebrate this sacred mystery with gift giving. For all of my early years the gifts were more important than the gift they were supposed to celebrate. Even at this late date in my life I am not nearly as excited about the Incarnation of God in Jesus as I was about the toys that were coming my way in my early years. **Now I'm beginning to realize that the most important part of this season for me is the time I have with people I love and care about. And this is where our hope is, the place where God is intimately present in our lives.**



*The  
Incarnation  
of Jesus  
teaches us  
to accept all  
of what is  
happening  
as a  
possibility  
for Divine  
action.*



*The way to  
healing and  
wholeness is  
to know, with  
every fiber  
of our being,  
that there is  
no distance  
between Divine  
Love and  
ourselves.*

**Advent is a time of giving birth to the divine child within our humanness.** This is how Jesus saves. Jesus is the archetype as well as the gracious and loving energy that helps us give birth to divine love within us. Love not just for “our” people but for all people, all who need and hunger for love.

**The Birth of a child brings a great turning inside out of history, a vulnerable child brings salvation and redemption to the whole human race.** What kings and statesmen, philosophers and artists, founders of religions and moral teachers vainly strive for, now comes about through a newborn child. God approaches us not in power and might but in the innocence and vulnerability of a child.

God prefers to elicit our affection rather than commandeer our compliance. **Salvation is about the way we love one another, not simply moral compliance and dogmatic acceptance. It takes place in our hearts not our heads.**



These Advent Gospels, these tales of God’s news continue to repeat themselves in our lives. Gabriel’s greeting is also meant for you and me. We are invited to bear divine life in our lives.



*The greatest gift of the Christmas and Advent seasons, Fr. Sedlak tells us, is to become aware of God's presence and love in our daily lives. Every time we respond to life and others with wonder and reverence, or gratitude and generosity, we experience the mystery of the Incarnation. In **A Child Is Born** Fr. Sedlak takes us on a journey through Advent that promises to open your heart again to the true joy of God's grace and love.*

Fr. Ken Sedlak has been a Redemptorist priest for over 40 years, and a spiritual guide to generations of parishioners at St. Michael's Church in Chicago. He wrote *A Child Is Born* based on his own spiritual journey with Pathways, a prayer and spiritual support group at St. Michael's Church in Chicago.

