



ICEBREAKER

Throughout the last nine months, we have all experienced various forms of virtual reality—virtual school, virtual meetings, virtual holidays, virtual shopping, virtual sporting events (no fans present).

1. What are you missing the most due to separation?
2. Is there an area of life you have been able to keep real? What have you prioritized?
3. What ways have you found to stay connected? What blessings have these days brought?

TIDINGS OF JOY

The readings the 3rd Sunday of Advent are full of joy—and of hope. The darkness is almost over. These words seem to be written for us today, as we anxiously wait for the ending of our isolation due to the pandemic amid news of vaccines becoming available. The end is in sight. Look at the readings and Gospel again on the USCCB website, or another source if you have one. [Third Sunday of Advent Readings](#)

1. What words and images jump out for you from each reading?
2. The first reading from Isaiah is the reading Jesus picked as he began his ministry. What do these words tell us about our ministry as the body of Christ in the world today?
3. Are we able to “in all circumstances give thanks” as Paul tells the Thessalonians in the second reading? This reading always reminds me of this story from long ago—it’s a short read but a powerful example of giving thanks in all circumstances. [Excerpt from *The Hiding Place*](#)

INCARNATION

In the Old Testament, God is physically present multiple times, for example to Moses in the burning bush, as a pillar of cloud or fire to lead the Israelites through the desert, as a whispering sound to Elijah.

God was present in the Temple in the Holy of Holies. God was manifest at the times of difficulties in the life of the Israelites. They longed for God to save them, to send a Messiah. In each instance, God chose a person, an anointed one, who would bring the people back to God. With the birth of Jesus, God's presence to his people is much more intimate; he comes as a human among humans, experiencing all we experience except sin. God now has a face.

During Advent we reflect on the coming of Jesus, not just as the Incarnate Son of God 2,000 years ago—although that is an important part of our remembering—but also how Jesus comes to us today and at the end of time. Each of these “comings” are incarnate. God is present to us physically. Today the Body of Christ is present in the Eucharist and in all the baptized. We are the incarnate presence of Jesus in the world today. As St. Teresa of Avila stated, “Christ has no body now by yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world...” Perhaps this is why our separation is so painful. How can we be Christ present in the world when we cannot be physically present to each other. We feel the longing to be present with those we love that God must have felt before his birth. And so we wait in anticipation for that day that we can be born again.

We also know that when Jesus comes at the end of time, he will come embodied and that all of creation will be physically present, not destroyed but perfected. We will no longer experience the pain of separation. When we are reunited after the pandemic, we will still feel this frustration, this lack of fulfillment. Let us be patient then and remember that even as we wait for the coming of Christ—at Christmas, in our lives today, and at the end of time—we also know that “the one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it” and that God's plan is always more marvelous than what we could have hoped for or dreamed about.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser wrote an article during Advent last year that speaks about the deep meaning of Incarnation. Take a few minutes to read this short article: [Deep Incarnation—Another Meaning of Christmas](#) then use the following questions for reflection.

1. How does the physical presence of someone change your interaction with them?
2. What does the Incarnation tell you about God?
3. What does the Incarnation mean for us as the Church?

May you have a blessed Advent!

