

“Pregnant Pauses” An Advent Reflection based on a paraphrase of Luke 1:26-56 delivered on the Third Sunday in Advent, December 14, 2025, by the Rev. Alison Andrea Young at the First Congregational UCC of Onkama, Michigan.

Advent, among other things, is both figuratively and literally, a pregnant pause. Not just a time of shopping, making wreaths, attending craft fairs, walking in Sleighbell Parades and attending concerts, as well as lighting the candles on the Advent wreath each Sunday in church. Advent is a time in which Mary “great with child” struggled, haltingly to accompany Joseph on a trip of about 90 miles back to his hometown in order to be counted in a governmentally mandated census—probably having to take frequent rest stops and worrying and wondering if she would make it to their destination before the baby she was carrying demanded to be born.

Advent, then, can be most aptly described as a “pregnant pause,” for it was indeed a time of preparation full of import and meaning—a time when the anxious waiting and silent suffering of an unwed pregnant teenager forced to travel in her last trimester, speaks louder than any prophetic scripture. Such as the scriptures when Isaiah prophesies to Ahaz that: “The Lord himself will give you a sign. Look the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14) Easy for you to say, Isaiah!

There is no mention in Isaiah’s prophesy, or in Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus, about what pregnancy really means--of the weight of carrying that child, the

stretch marks or of back labor, or constant heartburn or incontinence! Mary's quiet acceptance of what must have been a grueling and wildly unexpected pregnancy speaks eloquently to us as we ourselves wait, watch, and prepare for the inbreaking of God into this broken world once again—as we prepare for “Christmas,” literally the Mass, the sacred celebration, commemorating the birth of Christ.

The birth of Jesus itself, which was later to be viewed by people of faith as a fulfillment of prophetic scriptures, did not happen right away. It happened after a much longer “pregnant pause” of over eight centuries during which Israel waited and waited and suffered many set-backs, but in which it also kept faith with God. In fact, the experiences which shaped Israel's life throughout this time could be likened to a gestation period—a period of formation great with meaning, which would provide the basis and feed directly into the eventual birth of the Christian church.

Advent then, means “arrival” but it also means “coming.” In this season, as we prepare once again for the “re-arrival” of Immanuel, God-with-or in relationship to us,” in our midst, let us also remember all that was entailed in the journey—in the “coming.” Let us use this last little bit of preparation time, before allowing ourselves to experience the joy of the celebration of the actual birth, to pause and reflect on the “pregnant meaning” of the unasked for suffering of an unwed teenage girl walking and bouncing over rough terrain on a colt, on an

unwanted journey to a strange town, in order to unselfishly give us all a gift of unmeasurable value—the Christ child. To aid us in this reflection, I would ask you to close your eyes, and go on an over two-thousand-year-old journey into the past with me, as you listen to a poem by the late poet William Carlos Williams, appropriately entitled, “The Gift:”

The Gift

As the wise men of old brought gifts
 guided by a star
 to the humble birthplace
 of the god of love,
 the devils
 as an old print shows
 retreated in confusion.
 What could a baby know
 of gold ornaments
 or frankincense and myrrh,
 of priestly robes
 and devout genuflections?
 But the imagination
 knows all stories
 before they are told
 and knows the truth of this one
 past all defection
 The rich gifts
 so unsuitable for a child
 though devoutly proffered,
 stood for all that love can bring.
 The men were old
 how could they know
 of a mother's needs
 or a child's
 appetite?
 But as they kneeled
 the child was fed.
 They saw it
 and
 gave praise!
 A miracle
 had taken place,
 hard gold to love,
 a mother's milk!
 before
 their wondering eyes.

The ass brayed
the cattle lowed.
It was their nature.
All men by their nature give praise.
It is all
they can do.
The very devils
by their flight give praise.
What is death,
beside this?
Nothing. The wise men
came with gifts
and bowed down
to worship
this perfection.

Amen.

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