



PRAY

God of all history, we await Christmas as once the people of Israel awaited a messiah. Help us celebrate the Advent season and show appreciation for our families that have loved us into being. Amen.



SPIRIT

ADVENT



DOWN FOR THE NIGHT

by Heather Klassen

“Looks like we won’t be going anywhere tonight,” my dad says, returning from the ticket counter. “All the flights are cancelled. We can’t even get back home. The roads are all closed.”

“What?” I ask, bolting upright in my uncomfortable plastic airport chair. We’d been sitting here for half the day already, waiting through delay after delay.

“I just told you, Alex,” my dad explains again. “We’re snowbound. Another one of those storms of the century.”

“So we won’t be getting to Phil’s for Thanksgiving dinner,” my mother helpfully points out.

“Maybe we’ll get out of here sometime tomorrow.” My dad shrugs, then slumps into his chair. “Might as well make ourselves comfortable.”

I would laugh at that if I weren’t so thoroughly bummed.

Thanksgiving at my Uncle Phil’s ski lodge is the best possible vacation. We go every year and ski the best slopes and eat the best food and then eat and ski some more. But not this year. This year we get to spend Thanksgiving sitting in a crowded airport terminal, dining on lousy airport terminal food.

“This is so lame!” I practically shout as my fist slams onto the table next to me.

“Alex!” my mom practically shouts back. “Calm down! There’s nothing we can do about the situation, so just relax.”

Well, I’m not going to relax. Maybe there’s nothing I can do about being cheated out of my Thanksgiving vacation, but no one can stop me from being angry about it.

I slump into my seat and stare at my fellow stranded travelers. The usual assortment of grandparents,

college students, families with little kids. I’m sure everyone is just as bummed as I am at having their plans ruined.

The family sitting straight across from me consists of a youngish looking couple and a baby. As I stare sullenly ahead, I watch the baby being fed a bottle, then bounced around by its mother, then carried off to the restroom by dad, presumably heading to the changing table. As the baby returns, decked out in pajamas now, my dad appears in front of me.

“Here, Alex,” he says, offering me a styrofoam tray. “I bought you some pizza. Your favorite kind.”

“Gee, thanks, Dad,” I reply as I take the tray. “Pepperoni. My favorite Thanksgiving dinner.”

“Hang in there, Alex,” Dad says. “Maybe we’ll be able to salvage at least part of the weekend.”

I don’t reply, instead biting into my soggy slice.



John the Baptist attacks hypocrisy.

NARRATOR: In those days John the Baptizer came and began proclaiming in the desert of Judea:

JOHN: Turn away from your sins because the kingdom of heaven is near!

NARRATOR 1: John is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke—"a voice crying out in desert, 'Prepare a road for God; make straight God's path.'"

NARRATOR 2: John wore clothes made from camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. The people

of Jerusalem, the whole province of Judea, and from all the country around the Jordan River went out to see him. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan.

NARRATOR 1: When John saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to him to be baptized, he said to them:

JOHN: You snakes! Who told you to flee from the wrath about to come? Prove you have turned from your sins. Don't say to yourselves, "Abraham is our father." I tell you out of these rocks God can raise up children of Abraham! The ax lies at the root of

the tree. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire.

I baptize you with water to show that you have changed, but the one who will come after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He is much greater than I am; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He has his winnowing shovel with him, to thresh out all the grain; he will gather his wheat into his barn but burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out.

Matthew 3.1-12

The minutes, then hours, of excruciating boredom tick by. People talk, rustle magazine pages; kids chase each other through the aisles. I just sit and sulk. Finally, the terminal lights dim and the noises subside as first the kids, then the adults, drop off to sleep, either in their uncomfortable airport chairs, or laid out on the floor, using coats for pillows and covers.

I watch the youngish couple across the aisle arrange the baby in its carrier thing for the night, then huddle up together and go to sleep. My parents are sleeping, so is just about everyone else. So I give in and let myself drift off.

I don't know how long I sleep, but when I suddenly wake up again, the terminal is totally quiet. Everyone is sleeping except me.

Well, no, not everyone. The baby across the aisle in the carrier thing is awake. I can see its face by the light shining in from the deserted runways outside. I can see that the baby's eyes are open and looking right at me.

Stiff from sleeping in my plastic chair, I ease myself down onto the floor. Now I'm closer to the baby. The blue blanket with the trucks parading

across it clues me in to the idea that this baby is probably a boy baby. And he's watching me intently.

"Hey," I say softly.

The baby smiles at me.

"What are you smiling about, buddy?" I whisper. "You're in the same predicament as me. On your way to somewhere great for Thanksgiving, probably to the grandparents who were planning to spoil you rotten, and now look, you're stuck in this airport terminal instead."

Not too surprisingly, the baby doesn't answer. He just keeps gazing at me with that look of contentment on his face.

Watching the baby, I try to see things from his point of view. He doesn't actually care about great vacation

trips, or the snow piling up outside imprisoning us in this room. He's warm and dry (I assume), fed and safe, and here with the two people who love him more than anything else in the world, who would do anything in the world to keep him safe and happy.

I glance over at my slumped together snoozing parents, my pizza crusts on the styrofoam tray, the four walls and roof keeping me warm and safe and dry.

I look back at my new little buddy. "You're kind of small," I whisper, "but it seems that you may have things figured out better than I do."

But our conversation is coming to an end. The baby's eyes droop, then close, as he drifts off again.

Looks like a plan, I think, as I roll myself up in my jacket. I stretch out on the floor, waiting for sleep to catch me again. But this time I'm not going to sleep angry. The basics are covered, actually way more than covered if I really think about it, and I'm fine with it now. So, warm and dry, fed and safe, my new little buddy and I are down for the night.

QUESTIONS 1 How does waiting feel for Alex? 2 When have you been stuck waiting? 3 Why does interacting with the baby cause a change of heart for Alex? 4 What change of heart does John the Baptist want people to make? 5 What would John the Baptist say about being Catholic in name only? 6 How can you bear fruit as a Catholic Christian? 7 What change of heart do you need to make this Advent?

Discovering leaders for peace

By Anna Zaros

In last Sunday's first reading Isaiah explained his vision for peace. In this Sunday's first reading Isaiah highlights the kind of leader his people need to bring about peace.

Israel's leaders concern Isaiah. Many of Israel's kings offered no spiritual leadership. They worried more about their own power than about their own people, more about kingship than kinship.

As far as the prophet Isaiah is concerned, the royal family tree of David and his father Jesse is a dead stump. Isaiah no longer puts his hope in the recent kings of Israel, but instead hopes that God will raise up a new king, one who is Spirit-filled and cares about the people of Israel.

*A sprout shall spring
from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him:
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of counsel and of strength,
a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.
He shall judge the poor with justice,
and decide aright for the land's afflicted.*
Isaiah 11.1-3

Just as Isaiah's vision for peace still applies today, so does his vision of a leader for peace. Our world leaders often disappoint us and seem unconcerned

about fostering peace and justice. One way to build peace is to support leaders who seek to resolve injustices and conflicts.

Isaiah's words also remind us that the Spirit gifts each of us with the potential for building peace in our world. Being a peace builder is not reserved for powerful world leaders; rather, each of us has the ability to take on this role in our own lives.

The same Holy Spirit whose gifts Isaiah describes blesses us with gifts to be prophets in our time. In the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, the Church blesses us with the gifts of the Spirit for building peace among the people with whom we live.

We have the **gift of knowledge** for gathering information and learning one another's cultures and needs. We can use our minds to think through conflicts, seeking **understanding** of all sides. We have a capacity to learn from experience and gain **wisdom**, recognizing that ultimately we live in God's hands. We have insights we can share as **counsel**. We have the gift of **courage** to speak the truth and act upon it. We can feel **awe** at God's wonders and **reverence** God in worship.

In addition to the gifts of the Spirit, we each have different experiences, abilities, and talents. Our unique talents and abilities help us to work for peace each in our own

**Peace is the work of
justice and the effect
of charity.**

Catechism of the Catholic Church #2304

way. When we all work together the whole of our abilities and talents can bring about a positive peace for all.

Using our own gifts and talents, we can support leaders, and we can become leaders ourselves, who will contribute to building a peaceable kingdom in which even natural enemies become kin.

*The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the kid, and
the calf and the young lion will browse
together.*

A little child will lead them.

Isaiah 11.6

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Identify a conflict you need to negotiate or a choice you need to make as a group. How can each of the seven gifts of the Spirit contribute to helping you deal with the conflict or choice?
- 2 Identify the different ways your cultural background, family, and/or personal experiences contribute to your understanding of peace. What talents and abilities do you personally bring to the work of peace?
- 3 Invite musicians, actors, and painters to talk about how creating art contributes to their hopes for building peace.
- 4 Watch **A Force More Powerful**. Create an artistic mural that exhibits different leaders for peace and different nonviolent social movements. Also, decorate the mural with pictures that represent the tools and insights you can bring to peacebuilding in our world. Display the mural in your church or school.

A Force More Powerful

Nonviolent direct action, or civil disobedience, is a method peaceful movements use to bring about change. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used nonviolence to bring about desegregation and promote racial equality in the United States. The film *A Force More Powerful* documents how several social movements used nonviolent methods to end injustices. These movements range from ending apartheid in South Africa to Danish resistance to Nazi occupation.

Search out other people who have worked for peace from Isaiah's time to current times. Identify global and local peacemakers today and the nonviolent movements in which they participate. Peacemakers come from all walks of life and backgrounds. Share with others what you have learned about the history of nonviolence. Check out the film, the book and the game at aforcemorepowerful.org.