

A Word About Worship Advent 3

*“Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us;
let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us.”*

Whatever else Advent is about, it’s a chance to rediscover God’s graciousness. For what is coming at Bethlehem, at this very moment, is the God of bountiful grace and mercy—the child of grace for all God’s children. Advent is about rediscovering grace. The English word ‘grace’ translates the Greek word *charis*, which means ‘that which brings delight, joy, happiness, or good fortune.’

Grace happens. Thanks be to God. Grace isn’t something that we earn by making sure that a cosmic Santa knows we’re on the right side of ‘naughty and nice.’ It’s a gift, something freely given. It’s a surprise, something unexpected.

Grace is coming—that’s the heart of Advent Anticipation. Gifts, however, involve more than just a giver. A gift desires to be received, accepted. Advent Preparation is about ‘getting ready’ for grace—getting ready to be capable of accepting God’s gracious gift, the gift of God’s very Self, coming to dwell among us ‘full of grace and truth.’

Grace is a gift full of mercy, forgiveness and acceptance. Grace is the gift that satisfies where no other gift does, for grace is the gift that fulfills the very longing of our hearts for God. While we were out looking for God, God has been looking for us and continues to look for us. As the writer Kathleen Norris has said about grace, *“God loves to look at us, and loves it when we will look back at him.”* Advent is about preparing ourselves to be able to look back into the faces of God’s children so that we can find there, looking and longing for us to respond, the face of the Child in the manger.

Grace is what makes it possible

- To look at the unlovable and receive the gift of love
- To look at the lonely and see the possibility of community
- To look in the eyes of a stranger and find an angel unaware
- To look in the most unlikely of places and find God there, looking back with eyes full of *“bountiful grace and mercy.”*

The words of Julian of Norwich, almost seven centuries old, still sum up for me the theme of today’s collect:

“And this is a supreme friendship of our courteous Lord, that he protects us so tenderly whilst we are in our sins; and furthermore he touches us most secretly, and shows us our sins by the sweet light of mercy and grace.”

Advent is our pilgrimage dedicated to the renewal of our commitment to be a people of grace, the children of so courteous a Lord. **NLJ+**

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