

Blogging toward Sunday

By [Michael Pasquerello III](#)

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The church has traditionally considered Advent a penitential season, a time for changing one's mind and re-turning to God. It's a time for preparing the way of the Lord, the One who will come to consummate all things in the rule of God. The scripture lessons for the first Sunday of Advent are addressed to a pilgrim people, summoning them to stay awake and alert on a journey that leads to the fullness of God's kingdom. We are to "remember the future" in the hope that the Spirit will make present the One named in scripture.

Yet instead of remembering the future, the church's vision at this time of year seems to go no further than December 25. If Advent does nothing else, it unites eschatology and ecclesiology. Its movement is decidedly forward looking, grounded in the conviction that the God who has decisively acted in the past is still working in the church for the salvation of a world that is not destined to stay the way it is. In other words, things are not the way they are supposed to be.

In *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, Scott Bader-Saye argues that our lives are easily ruled by "apocalyptic fear" rather than divine goodness; that following Jesus involves us in risky practices that fuel temptations to live out of self-preservation instead of self-giving love. Bader-Saye suggests we need a kind of courage to "go on" that is fueled by hope in God. We need to receive our life and destiny as gifts poured out by a gracious God who is capable of sustaining us as witnesses to God's peace in the midst of a chaotic, violent world.

Prior to the advent of modernity, most people believed that world had a story because the world had an author. History is God's story, they would have said, and while humans are capable of creating confusion during the middle scenes of the drama, God never ceases to guide and direct the

creation to its good end ... People could trust time and history because they trusted that the God who created the world would finally reconcile all things.

The scripture lessons for beginning the season of Advent call us to make peace and to live peaceably—living towards an end known only to God. In remembering and celebrating the birth of God's son, we are invited to worship the One who was welcomed as the sign of God's peace on earth, and who will return to gather up all things into that peace. It is hard to imagine a more timely message.