

On the first day of Advent

By [Diane Roth](#)

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I consider the word "eschatology."

It's not a word I use in everyday conversation. Sunday's lessons were all over "eschatology," though I can tell you know that no one used the "E" word. Not even once.

The first time I heard the word was in high school. I was going through my first wave of serious religious doubt, and I tried to calm my anxiety by reading books about Jesus from the religion section of the public library. I know, it was a weird idea, right? But many of the writers said that the "historical Jesus" was an "eschatological prophet", whatever that meant.

Later I learned that "eschatological" means "about last things." To consider eschatology is to consider where we are going to end up, what the last page of the story is going to say, what is the climax and the denouement of history. Are we going around in endless circles, or is there a plot, a story, with twists and turns and lessons learned: a final reckoning? What do you say?

So we begin Advent with this sense that we are waiting for something, that there is an endpoint somewhere Out There.

But Sunday was the first Sunday of Advent, and we do know that we are waiting. We are counting down the Sundays until Christmas, and the days until Christmas. There are candles to light that will help us to count, and there are Advent calendars, too. Some of them have chocolate, and some of them have stickers.

We unveiled a countdown clock Sunday at worship. 23 days, 13 hours, and innumerable minutes before Christmas, was what it said. I found it difficult to look away. The minutes were ticking away. I should be doing something. The time is short, after all.

It's a great visual aid, useful on many levels. The time is short, after all. But I can't help thinking that Christmas is not really the endpoint. Christmas is a way station, a still point, an inn with a manger and a baby we can hold. But the dream, the vision, the endpoint, the last page is this: the place where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, where the nations will come to feast, where the lame will leap for joy.

Christmas is not the end. Christmas is the beginning, the beginning of God-with-us.

Advent is before the beginning. It is the pause before you begin. It is the breath you hold, the time before the downbeat.

Advent is not the journey. God is with us on the journey, all the way until the last page. Advent is that moment right before you say something, and you don't know what to say, and then you realize that God must give you words. And then you wonder if God will give you the words, and you stand there exposed and uncomfortable.

And then you say, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me."

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