

The great “nonetheless”

By [David Heim](#)

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Some people can't get enough of Christmas carols. I can't get enough of Advent hymns. “Prepare the Royal Highway,” “Creator of the Stars of Night,” “On Jordan's Banks the Baptist's Cry,” “People, Look East,” “Comfort, Comfort, Now My People,” “Fling Wide the Door,” “Unexpected and Mysterious”—there just aren't enough Advent Sundays to sing all the great ones.

I came across [a commentary that said, “Advent is the hardest of times](#) for Christians,” because it calls us to “embrace the darkness and the silence and the cold” rather than enjoy the warm glow of Christmas.

But Advent seems to me the easiest season for faith, because it's the most truthful. It's not a struggle for us to embrace the darkness, silence and cold—they've embraced us. We can't avoid them. Embracing the glow of Christmas (or the joy of Easter) can seem a bit forced, whereas Advent is utterly honest: things are bleak, we're buried in the earth, we're groaning under sorrow's load; the only hope is that a seed is buried somewhere and a shoot will spring out. The only hope is the promise of God.

In an Advent reflection, [Philip H. Pfatteicher points](#) out that the coming of Jesus often seems to have made little difference in the world. “A quiet voice whispers, ‘Maybe you are mistaken.’ Against that possibility, Christian people cling to the biblical promises and utter the great ‘nonetheless.’” Advent is about uttering—singing—the great “nonetheless.”

I've read that blue is the liturgical color for Advent because blue is associated with kings (Jesus is the coming king) and with the virgin Mary. But I like the notion that blue is the color of hope. Advent blue is that deep blue that appears in the sky when the sun is almost gone, a streak appearing across the sky where blue fades into black. Or is it black edging into blue? In any case, as we see the blue and the encroaching darkness together we are stirred to an improbable hope: “The night is far gone, the day is near.”