

Serious waiting

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [December 10, 2014](#) issue



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*Oh! You better watch out, you better not cry,
you better not pout, I'm tellin' you why:
Santa Claus is coming to town.*

There's something almost painful yet delicious about a child who's waiting for Christmas, counting the days, wishing and hoping, until on December 24 he can't fall asleep.

It's a variation on the waiting we do all our lives. We wait to be old enough to go to school, ride a bicycle, and drive an automobile. We wait to land a job or find the right person. We wait for a promotion, a raise, or retirement. And some of us wait decades for the Chicago Cubs to play in and win a World Series.

Waiting is a universal and deeply human experience. In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, two characters sit and wait for Godot. They talk and talk, back and forth, but Godot never comes.

Although it may be futile to wait for Godot, waiting for God is a major biblical theme. "I wait for the Lord all day long," the psalmist wrote. Hosea urges, "Wait continually for your God," and Isaiah says, "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, walk and not faint."

Biblical waiting takes place during the Babylonian exile, a time that's bleak and not at all promising. The people of God are being held in captivity far from home with only precious memories of their beautiful city and temple. We sing about them during Advent: "O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here." Over and over down through the centuries the prophets advise them to wait and watch for God to act, for the promised day of the Lord.

For many of us Advent is the most meaningful season of the church year. We slow down and sit for a while in darkness while the liturgy turns to somber purple, and we sing profound and beautiful hymns in minor keys. It's time for serious waiting for the Christ child, for the future the child promises is not only coming but also present in the life of the world if we can watch and wait patiently for it. It is not passive waiting, sitting around whiling away the time. Advent waiting is living into that future, leaning into it by praying, hoping, and working for the coming reign of God. It is anything but the mindless and meaningless waiting of Beckett's *Godot*.

In these weeks, let us wait and watch for ways the promised kingdom already comes, ways that are quiet and unexpected—the kindness of a friend, the healing of a gentle touch, an act of generosity, a gesture of grace.