

Something for the Heart: *A Brightened Landscape. . .*

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. Isaiah 9:2

It has been a gray few days here in Minnesota. As I look out my office window, the view is of dead grass, barren trees and cloudy skies. Yet in the midst of this bleak landscape, there have also been unmistakable signs of life. Yesterday it was hawk flying between the trees. A bright red cardinal perched upon the pruned-down remains of the rain garden. A few days ago it was a coyote running along hill next to the woods. Deer are often present grazing along the wetlands.

In many ways our Minnesota December offers an appropriate image for Advent. We spend our time waiting, along with the people of Israel who have been walking in darkness. Their darkness has to do not so much with the weather and shortened days, but the fact that they are living as people oppressed by the Roman empire. Yet in the midst of their own bleak landscape, our Advent texts point out unmistakable signs of life.

Our first week in Advent, we heard Jesus' command to be awake – to be alert to what God was doing in the world. The second week we heard Jesus proclaiming the good news of God saying *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near."* And in week three we heard from John that the "true light was coming into the world."

Finally, this week, we will hear from the angel Gabriel who will proclaim to Mary that she will bear a son and *"he will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David."*

The people of Israel – Mary's people – have been walking in darkness, but the bleak landscape is about to change. Upon them – and us – the light is about to shine. Thanks be to God.

Quick Quips

Advent: the time to listen for footsteps - you can't hear footsteps when you're running yourself. ~Bill McKibben

A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes...and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent. ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Let's approach Christmas with an expectant hush, rather than a last-minute rush.
~ Anonymous