

PODCAST START:

[intro music]

Brian: Welcome to the Queer Theology podcast!

Fr. Shay: Where each episode, we take a queer look at the week's lectionary readings. We're the cofounders of QueerTheology.com and the hosts for this podcast. I'm Father Shay Kearns —

B: And I'm Brian G. Murphy.

FS: This week we're taking a look at the lectionary texts for December 2nd. This week is all about the end times and the end of the world, but it's also the beginning of Advent. It's kind of this strange lectionary choice [laughs] of all of these end of the world texts as we start the preparation, in our church calendar, of the birth of Jesus. We're starting a new year, a new lectionary cycle, which is really exciting.

Today we thought we'd talk a little bit about Advent and some ways that you can maybe observe Advent, even if you're not connected to a religious community, or you're still trying to figure out what you believe about all of this faith and Christianity stuff. So Brian, as you think about Advent, what are some of the ways that you like to observe this season. What are some thoughts that come up for you when you think about Advent?

B: You know, I'm very aware of the weather changing and the days getting shorter, at least in the northern hemisphere. So for me, this time of Advent comes with a bit of a slowing down, sort of a more contemplative period, which aligns with the spirit of Advent. The Christian calendar was designed this way so that this spirit of waiting and reflecting aligns with a sort of natural cycle of slowing [laughs] and reflecting and hibernating. So for me, this period of the end of November, December, really is a time of reflecting. I try to spend more time journaling. I just actually, a few days ago, recommitted to a daily meditation practice. So for me, I'm trying to be intentional about waiting and reflecting. There's some other stuff too that I'll talk about later, but what about you? [laughs] I don't wanna talk forever and ever.

FS: I, too, love this season. I think the liturgical seasons that are a little bit more depressing [laughs] or slow or blue are my favorite, because they make space for us to not have everything all together, and for things to not be perfect. As

someone who grew up evangelical, where there was such an emphasis on happy faith all of the time – you couldn't actually have a bad thought or emotion – I really appreciate the ways that being a follower of the liturgical calendar allows space to grieve and to mourn and to sink into the darkness, and all of the ways that that is a part of what it means to be human. I love this sense of Advent for that, for acknowledging the longer nights and acknowledging the kind of longing and pain of the world as we wait for this hope that we've been promised. For me, it's about just sitting with those emotions and allowing them to be present in my life.

And then, you know, as someone who is part of a community – it's also about lighting candles, the Advent candles, and the O Antiphons that are spoken in church each week, where we remember a different element of Jesus. I think that that's really important and special.

We'd love to offer some concrete suggestions for folks who might be celebrating Advent or wanting to observe Advent on their own. So Brian, what are some examples that you would give on ways that people can observe this season?

B: So I came up with a load of a list. I mentioned earlier sort of committing to a practice of daily meditation or daily prayer, and that can look however you want it to look. It can be sort of a more active prayer, it can be sort of sitting in silence, listening and waiting, it can be a mindfulness practice of noticing your breath or noticing the sounds around you – just really trying to be present as we wait and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. You might also, in addition to that or separately, read a poem a day. Find different poems from different sources that could speak to you, encourage you, inspire you – things like that.

Also, this could be a time of curling up on a couch with a book and reading a book about this season. Last year we read this book called *The First Christmas* inside of Sanctuary Collective by Borg and Crossan. It's all about the First Christmas and what that meant to the early followers of Jesus. I definitely would recommend that book. What about you, Shay? What would you add?

FS: I think this is also a season to maybe do an act of kindness every day. It could be something as simple as sending a card to someone or donating money to a nonprofit that you really care about, or something more elaborate. I love the idea of Advent calendars – you can indulge in some whimsy and get the ones with chocolate behind every door, or a Lego mini figure, or whatever it is that works for you – just as a way to be intentional. We're counting down, we're waiting for this thing. Those Advent calendars can help us in the practice of waiting.

I know that there's also some justice-themed ones where there's a different action every day. I think there's also some Instagram challenges where you're given a word of the day and you take a picture that is inspired by that word. There are ways to be creative in the counting down. I think too, the lighting of candles – whether you light candles every night, or whether you just light them on Sundays and read some scripture – it can be a really powerful thing to do, whether you put them in a wreath or do something different.

Brian, you and I were also talking about this idea that this is also an opportunity to sit loosely with both the Christian tradition and maybe pagan or natural traditions, right? Solstice comes up at this time. Realizing that these traditions aren't antithetical to one another, but they can sit comfortably together, and you can observe both seasonal things and this Advent season at the same time.

B: You know, many of the Christian traditions come from pagan naturalist traditions already. They're already intertwined. We get a surprising number of messages on our tumblr about paganism or other sort of non-Christian practices, Wicca... Christianity is already a hybrid, so you can definitely sink into those as that feels right for you.

And you know, I also want to just name that I think Advent is such a perfect time of year for LGBTQ Christians, because it's holding these two things in tension. It's dark and cold and a scary world, and you know, for many LGBTQ people, we *know* that. It's scary to come out. Sometimes our family and friends don't except us. And yet, Christians are in the midst of this of this darkness, waiting for the coming of the Messiah. I think LGBTQ Christians especially understand that. Waiting for our family to accept us, waiting for the church to change, waiting to be able to start testosterone or save for the surgeries that we need. This time of year can be particularly meaningful to LGBTQ Christians, and also particularly hard for folks with, you know, Thanksgiving having just passed and Christmas coming up. It's a time that we are often forced to confront our families of origin and our relationships, or lack thereof, with them.

If this time of year is hard for you, we totally understand that. A few years ago, around this time of year, I was massively depressed [laughs] and had a terrible relationship with my partner Peter's family. And in the midst of that, somehow managed to summon just enough strength to put together an LGBTQ Christian guide to self care. I didn't want folks to have to go through what I was going through so I created this free, three-part video series about it that you can get at QueerTheology.com/selfcare. That also tells you a little bit more about this more extensive self care toolkit and guide that we put together inside of Sanctuary

Collective, which is also just an amazing place. LGBTQ folks and also straight, cis-gender supporters from around the world are in there, learning and growing and supporting each other together.

This time of year in particular I feel like Sanctuary Collective is extra valuable for folks, because this time of year is just so fraught. So I encourage you, if you don't have a supportive community in your day-to-day life or you're just looking to grow and deepen your faith and your sense of queerness – or sort of be a better supporter – we would love to have you inside. You can learn more about that at QueerTheology.com/community. So yeah, that's all for now. We'll talk to you next week!

[outro music]

B: The Queer Theology podcast is just one of many things that we do at QueerTheology.com, which provides resources, community and inspiration for LGBTQ Christians and straight cisgender supporters.

FS: To dive into more of the action, visit us at QueerTheology.com. You can also connect with us online on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram.

B: We'll see you next week.

PODCAST END

Transcript by Taylor Walker