

# ADVENT

*“Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,  
To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
To guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1, 78-79*

There are two basic co-ordinates that hem in our human existence: space and time. The first of these we somehow bend to our requirements: transport gets faster and faster, and global communication potentially allows us to reach people thousands of miles away. All this creates the illusion that we may also master the second dimension, that is, time. There is however a psychological aspect of our relationship with time which continually reminds us that this pretension of ours has always been, and will probably for ever continue to be, an illusion. That aspect is waiting. Sometimes it can get to be exasperating and sometimes it may be pleasurable, but most often it is transformed into a monotonous, daily process — that of “killing time”. The common denominator of all kinds of waiting is always the sensation of impotence when faced with the passing of time.

In the liturgy of the Christian churches, the hymn of Zacharias (Luke 1, 78-79) is linked to the season of Advent, which is the period of waiting par excellence. Some exegetes have even put forward the thesis that the text transmits to us one of the hymns sung during the meetings of the first Christians. In the Western Monastic tradition the hymn of Zacharias announces, during lauds at matins, the ending of night and the arriving of the new day. During the grey December mornings or the dark winter afternoons these words become very suggestive: the dawn shining over the darkness and the shadows; the way of peace which, far off

though it may be, can clearly be discerned on the horizon that is wrapped in darkness, but already visible. All this causes us to enter into another dimension of time: into a waiting which is not waiting but fulfilment, into a future which is transformed into the eternal present of God; the God who, however, is not just the all-powerful God of time and of eternity.

The dawn, which tinges the dark blue of the sky of a long, cold winter's night with violet, reminds us that the God of the patriarchs and prophets, moved by feelings of compassion, draws near to mankind's cold solitude and wraps it in the warm cloak of His inexhaustible Grace. These statements will certainly not lessen the hardship of winter evenings for those who have to face the lonely dimension of waiting. Maybe empty and wearisome waiting will get even harder for those who have been neglected by relatives and friends and who face the experience of old age or illness. Yet the joyful cry of the aged priest Zacharias still has the power to reach out into the darkest corners of our cities, towns and villages. And the echo of this cry is repeated in the middle of a long night, in a room full of disturbing shadows: peace be with you. Your God, who is merciful, is at hand and His Grace is transforming the world. Amen...

*Franco Maggiotto*