

Janet McKenzie, 'Mary with the Midwives'

Loreto Prayer for Advent Week 4

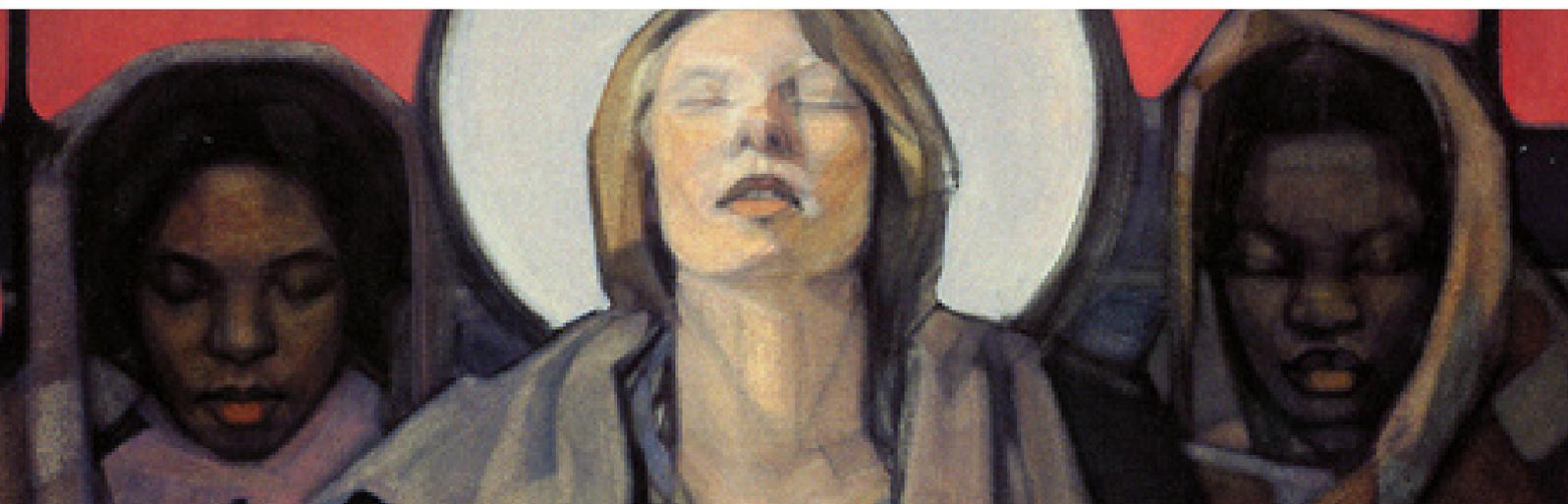
In our Advent series, we invite the reader and viewer into personal and communal contemplation of images that evoke an element of this liturgical season.

Advent is such a counter-cultural season, infusing our pre-Christmas crush with doses of hope and promise. The disclosive actions of our tradition call us to keep watch and wait, always attentive to the life within and around us. Waiting has been well-practised in this pandemic year. We have waited for the daily Covid-19 'numbers'... we have waited to move to the next easing of

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lockdown restrictions... we have waited for that much-desired hair appointment... we wait for a vaccine... we wait to re-unite with family and friends across borders and seas... we wait to meet newly born family members and mourn the loss of loved ones when we can hug and hold those grieving.

For many of our sisters and brothers, however, 'waiting' is not a sanitised spiritual practice. Our First Nations people wait for recognition of suffering and dispossession, reparation and respect for rights. Incarcerated young people wait in dehumanising detention. Refugees and asylum seekers in our community wait out Covid-19 without government support, food and access to meaningful work. Women and children cower in violent lockdown realities, unable to wait any longer. Women in our church, desiring to use our God-gifted leadership potential, are admonished - change takes time...we must wait! I am shamed that my post-Covid desire is simply to resume overseas travel, when I am complicit in watering down the hope and promise offered to all. "We're not out of lockdown until we're all out of lockdown" urged a placard at a recent Melbourne rally on behalf of asylum seekers in local detention for absolutely no reason. The liturgy calls us daily 'to wait in joyful hope', however waiting is neither joyful nor holy when justice is denied.



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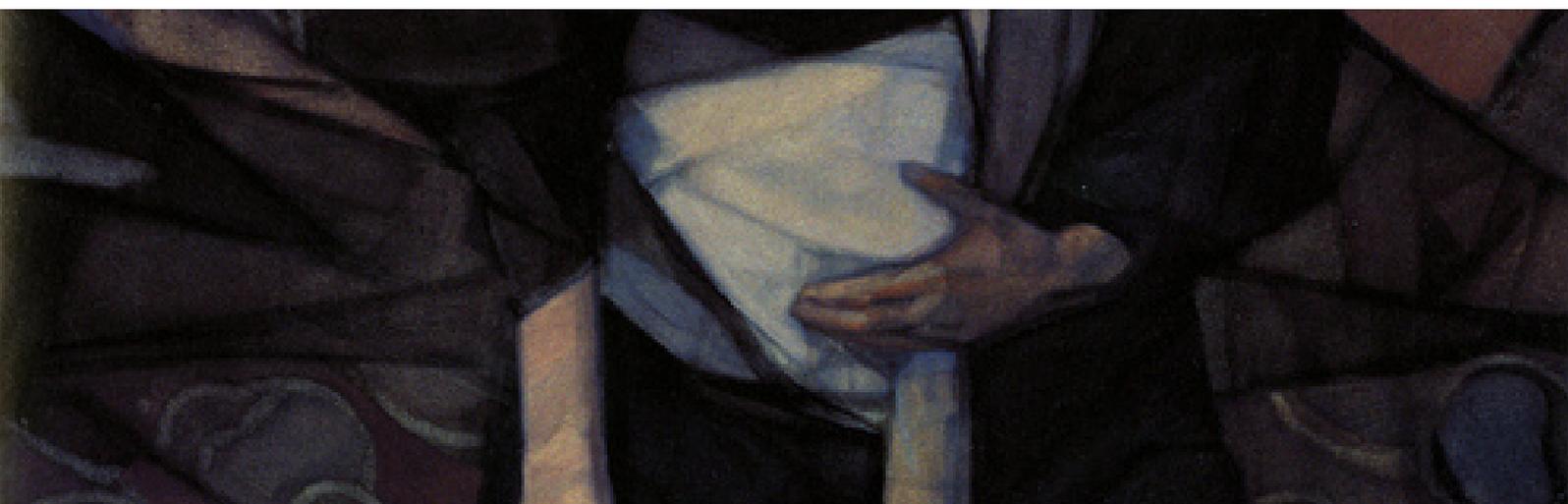
In Latino cultures, depictions of a heavily pregnant Mary, the Madonna of Hope, remind us that, even for Mary, waiting came to an end. Janet McKenzie's powerful, 'Mary with the Midwives', also alludes to the mix of pain and joy present at the end of Mary's waiting. As December stretches on, maybe our tired bodies can sensitise us to the pain of those held in perpetual holding patterns of despair in our detention centres, prison cells, mental health system, outcome-focused schools and frayed families. May we, with Mary, touch the hope in our bellies, that sacred space where our values find palpable expression, becoming life for our blessed and broken world!

SCAFFOLD FOR REFLECTION

Where is a felt sense of waiting located within your body...

With whom are you waiting...

What is your deepest longing for our Covid-normal world...



PRAYER

On Dec. 17, the church's liturgy begins the "O" antiphons which are ancient refrains dating to the eighth century. Each day until Dec. 23, a different "O" antiphon is sung at Mass and in the church's Evening Prayer. The antiphons weave biblical imagery from the Hebrew Scriptures into a lovely theological tapestry celebrating the messianic titles of Jesus and what they might mean — yesterday, today and tomorrow.

These messianic titles are respectively, O Sapientia (O Wisdom), O Adonai (O Lord/Leader), O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse), O Clavis David (O Key of David), O Oriens (O Radiant Dawn/Dayspring), O Rex Gentium (O King of the Nations), O Emmanuel (O God-With-Us).

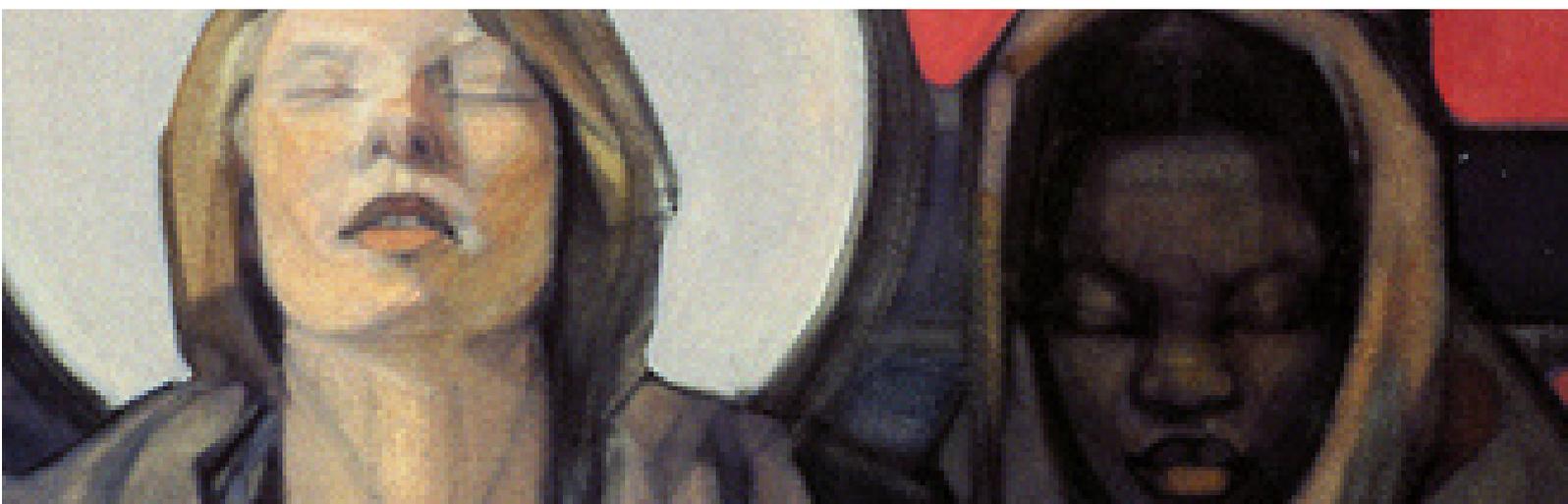
This poem-prayer, composed by Sr Christine Schenk, invites us into the discomfort and daring of Advent waiting for Jesus:

O Wisdom,

Sophia's child,

and Mary's too

bring us back to you.



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O Adonai,

set us free of fear, despair,
misogyny.

O Justice Flower,

of Jesse tree,
uproot our hatreds. Wash us clean
in just-reign waters,
plant us deep in Thee.

O Key of David,

open heaven's gate
unlock, unblock,
a captive people
too long enthralled
by hate.

O Radiant Dawn,

light the way
of all who long
to preach, to teach,
to consecrate
heavenly hosts
of God's indwelling.



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O Emmanuel,

strengthen weary arms,
steady trembling knees
bring surcease of sorrow.

O Advent Light,

dispel death's dark shadow.
Awaken a waiting world
to life's fresh-blessed tomorrow.

AWARENESS & ACTION

December 23

Today we join with the global Mary Ward family in praying for her ecclesial recognition as the saint we know her to be. How long do we have to wait? Aren't **we** the hoped-for 'miracle' - women who have served and led with hope and promise within a slow-moving church for over 400 years. I, for one, am tired of waiting!

Anne Muirhead

Loreto Director of Mission | December 2020

