



## Hidden Jesus

by Peter Covington

One of the delightful world celebrations that I discovered once upon a time is the Latin American tradition of initially putting out their nativity scene without baby Jesus in the manger. Everything else about the scene is intact, including the star and the manger which announce and get ready for the holy birth. But as any good Latin American mother will explain, “*of course Jesus doesn’t come until Christmas Eve,*” and in fact that very same, sweet mother was probably the person who hid the baby away until the right moment on Christmas Eve when the baby comes out and the Christmas celebration begins.



Even at work in Peru, the staff decorated for the holiday and my very kind secretary asked me to hide the baby. Although it felt a bit sacrilegious, I put the baby in my bottom desk drawer. **This hidden Jesus is all part of the anticipation of the coming celebrations,** and in many Latin American families, people do not eat anything on Christmas Eve until midnight when the baby comes out and the feast begins. In a similar fashion, much of the German-speaking world hides the Christmas tree away from the Children until

it comes out at the appointed time and celebration begins in earnest, as decided by those God-like figures of our childhood, the parents. Of course, the big reveal is a magical moment, not to conflate God with magic, but the absence creates a special moment when all the tension is resolved and celebration begins, in a complete change of attitude.

I think this is a good life lesson. Somehow, God seems to never get my messages about how I would like to see good things roll out in my life, and there are these awkward periods of waiting and supposed patience on my part.... I am sure if any of these Christmas hiding activities were practiced standardly in the United States, a parallel tradition would have developed of children trying to find the hidden baby Jesus or the Christmas tree. Unfortunately, impatience seems to be part of our nature, and the idea that we cannot control the timing of good things in our lives feels like real pain. However, despite being close to many Latin American “bad boys,” none of them ever mentioned or at least didn’t admit to ever trying to speed up the Christmas celebration by finding baby Jesus early. Parents, like God, have their own inscrutable timing! While we know our happiness and ultimate salvation are coming, there is always a certain desire to have the party NOW.

**I imagine Mary’s anticipation in waiting for the hidden baby Jesus to be revealed.** She knew he was coming, could actually feel him, and was told the basic outline of what would happen, but she must have been very curious and maybe a little anxious to actually see what would happen next. Any story that starts with the arrival of an angel probably has a fairly spectacular plotline. And God hid the ultimate gift from Mary and the world inside of her. Talk about the ultimate, peek-proof packaging of a gift—especially in the days before ultrasound! In the same way, we too must wait for the gifts of God to be revealed, and sometimes, like Mary, we may feel them growing inside us until they are born at the right time ordained by our Creator and the Creator of the coming divine gift.

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Advent Scripture Reference Lectionary  
[Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 30:19-26; Acts 13:16-25](#)

Advent Hymn Reflection  
**“For Unto Us A Child is Born”**  
from Handel's *Messiah* (1742), performed by Megaron Choir



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