

Advent Devotional

by Dr. Carla Sherrell, EdD (encore from 2019)

More than One Advent

I have often said that Advent was not celebrated in the church of my youth. And, it is true that I didn't hear the word enough during my childhood to even know what it meant as an adult. During my twenties, I made a concerted effort to read about Advent and to visit church services when it was being celebrated. Since becoming a part of MCC, I have come to know Advent as a spiritual practice that I can connect with and make "my own" in community. Not only my mind, but my body, emotions, and spirit settle into it, and I find it resourcing, revitalizing, and healing.

As I more deeply experience Advent as worship ritual alive in my body, I have become less willing to simply say that the Black fundamentalist church I came up in did not celebrate Advent. Memories of this season tell me something different.



Advent means **coming**, and my childhood church memories are filled with messages of the miracle of the coming of God, in human form, in the body, mind, heart, and soul of a baby. These messages pervaded the common rituals of the worship of my youth during this season, infusing

them with a kind of gentleness that emerged in awaiting the arrival of Baby Jesus.

The songs, scripture readings, sermons, and prayers were all about Advent. The Lord's Supper (Communion) became a contemplation on the coming of a sweet, vulnerable baby entering a new family, and, in the same moment, the painful and humbling awareness of a future grown-up who would give up that body in service to the transformation of despair, violence, and injustice into hope, love, joy, and peace.

My memories tell me that the Advent event in the church of my youth was Christmas Eve service. Getting dressed for the service, the two-block walk to the church in the cold night air, entering the sanctuary, and being filled with the warmth of community and shared anticipation of the coming of the sacred.

These are middle childhood and middle adolescent memories. The meaning that I make as I look back on them is complex, as a woman who has always loved women, raised in that church and that theology.

Yet, these memories connect my past to my present, and future, Advents. These connections provide my body, mind, emotions, and spirit with healing as, in this season, I contemplate the fiercely loving gift of the coming of Jesus. I am so grateful to do so here, in this community.