

Waiting for Living Bread

An Advent Service by Donna Mast
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Advance Preparation

You will need a worship leader, song leader, and two readers, plus an apron, a covered bowl of yeast bread dough, and a clean surface on which to knead. You may conclude this service with the sharing of traditional Christmas breads from around the world—*stollen*, *kolach*, *hoska*, Three Kings Bread, *panettonem*, or *christopsomo*. Recipes follow.

Program

Sing HWB 186 “Fling wide the door” and HWB 184 “Hark! The glad sound!”

The following reading begins at a moderate pace, building in speed until the leader “interrupts” the flow of words.

Reader 1: It’s the season of anticipation.

Reader 2: It’s the season of preparation.

Reader 1: It’s the season of parties.

Reader 2: It’s the season of programs.

Reader 1: It’s the time of singing carols.

Reader 2: It’s the time of sending cards.

Reader 1: It’s time to make plans.

Reader 2: It’s time to buy presents.

Reader 1: It’s time to wrap presents . . .

Reader 2: . . . and bake cookies . . .

Reader 1: . . . and put up the tree. . .

Reader 2: . . . and decorate the house. . .

Leader: Wait! Slow down. It sounds rather frenzied in here.

It *is* the time of preparation. *And* the season of anticipation.

But anticipation involves waiting. Why don’t you listen for a few minutes.

(Leader puts on apron and slowly begins to knead the dough while she talks. This could be done with two people, one kneading and the other speaking.)

Leader: There's a real art to bread-making. Of course, a recipe specifies what the ingredients are and tells how much flour to add. But the atmosphere of the room—the heat and humidity—affects the dough. Flour, even though it feels dry, contains a small amount of moisture, which varies with the atmosphere. This means that the exact amount of flour needed to make the dough varies from day to day. And so, the seasoned bread-maker adjusts the flour according to the conditions of the day.

Next comes the kneading. This is necessary to develop the elasticity of the gluten in the flour. The yeast works in combination with this elasticity to make the dough rise properly. The bread-maker learns to judge how well the elasticity has been developed by the feel of the dough.

But the greatest amount of time in bread-making is spent in waiting. After the dough has been kneaded, and placed in a warm, moist environment, the bread-maker must simply wait, allowing the yeast to do its work. This waiting is also an art, for the bread-maker must wait just the right amount of time, and this time also varies from day to day, depending on the conditions. If the bread-maker moves too quickly into the next step, the result will be a bread that is hard, heavy, and unpleasant. If the bread-maker waits too long, the dough will collapse, resulting in a bread that is also hard and unpleasant. Waiting is vital to the process of bread-making.

After the dough has risen, it must be shaped and allowed to rise again. Again the bread-maker must wait, carefully staying attuned to the condition of the dough. Finally, the bread is ready to be baked. After putting the loaves in the oven, the bread-maker waits yet again. Anticipation builds as the aroma of baking bread fills the room, but the bread cannot be eaten until all these times of waiting have taken place.

Jesus called himself the living bread. He told us we must eat of this bread which is himself. In John 6:47-51, he says, "Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Jesus, our living bread, has risen, and we have been nourished many times. But now, in this season of Advent, we wait. It is our job to learn to wait in openness for the Lord. The process cannot be rushed. God, the Master Bread-maker, has brought this miracle of bread into our lives many times before. Now God desires to make these preparations once more within each one of us. Our part in this process is to wait, yielded to the touch of the Master Bread-maker. Now, in the time and space of this service I invite you to relax, remain alert to the conditions of your soul—and wait. Allow the yeast to do its work. Imagine the rich smell of baking bread and allow your mouths to water as you anticipate this fresh, nourishing bread, which is Jesus, coming again into our world. *(Allow a few moments of silence before continuing. The remainder of the service is reflective in mood.)*

Sing HWB 172 "O come, O come, Immanuel."

Leader: Please join me in praying Psalm 85. I'll be pausing between phrases to allow you room for reflection. Allow the Holy Spirit to take your thoughts where they need to go in the space. Let's pray.

(Slowly) Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger. Restore us again, O God of our salvation *(pause)*, restore us again. *(Pause.)* Restore *me* again. *(Pause.)*

Put away your indignation toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you? *(Pause.)* Revive us again. *(Pause.)* Revive *me* again. *(Pause.)*

Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. *(Pause.)* Show me your steadfast love. Grant me your salvation. *(Pause.)*

Let me hear, Lord, what you will speak, for you will speak peace to your people, to your faithful, to those who turn to you in their hearts. *(Pause.)* I turn my heart to you. *(Pause.)* Surely your salvation is at hand for those who fear you, that your glory may dwell among us. Lord, show me your salvation. *(Pause.)* Show me your glory. *(Pause.)*

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. *(Pause.)*

Lord, you always give what is good. *(Pause.)* Righteousness will go before you, and will make a path for your steps. We give you thanks. Amen.

Sing HWB 178 "Come, thou long-expected Jesus."

Leader: Mark 1:1-8—"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

Reader 1: 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

Reader 2: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'

Leader: John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed,

Reader 2: 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

Sing HWB 183 "On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry."

Leader: *(From John 1:14, 16, NIV)* The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only. From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. Go out in expectation. Wait in hope. Amen.