



Waiting for the Bloom

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Last year for Christmas, my parents got an amaryllis plant. If you've never seen amaryllis bulbs, they're not that promising; in fact, they're pretty ugly. The bulb arrives with instructions: bury it in soil until just the tip shows, and then water it. When I left after the holidays to return to life in D.C., after helping my mom plant the bulb, their amaryllis plant was just a pot, some dirt, and the barest tip of the bulb peeping out. About a month later, I got a text from my mom. The plant had bloomed: a tall, cheerful red flower. The idea that this plant, which at first appeared barren and lonely, eventually bloomed took root within me (pun intended).

I'm not sure what bulb you've got right now, or what you're holding. Advent is one of those times when we weave in and out of hope and longing, a season when the edges of all that we feel become a little more frayed. Whether it is a reminder of those no longer with us, dreams unfulfilled, promises of a world yet to be, grief over the turmoil of the world—all of these crowd our Advent, jostling with each other for space, right when we're supposed to be making room for joy and peace and hope.

For many people I know, the rhythms of Advent—waiting and hoping, wonder and mystery—speak to a joy that we're not yet ready to receive. It is a rehearsal for a joy that we are uncertain will ever come. I wish my easy metaphor of the amaryllis blooming out of what looked to be barren existence transferred so easily to the heartaches of life. I wish I could say with certainty that with a little care and little time a beautiful flower will bloom. But what I can say with certainty is that, as an Advent people, we are called to look to the barren places of our lives and the world around us and nurture them. We are called to hold fast to hope even as we sit with and hold the turmoil and brokenness of the world.

Throughout history, the amaryllis has been a symbol of strength, determination, and radiant beauty. As we look to the Christ child, may the hope of beauty and joy yet to spring forth within you—like the bare bulb of the amaryllis—be nurtured and bring you solace. And may the community of faith hold you tight until then.

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