

Year B Advent II

These Teaching Tips are not Scripture commentaries, but rather brief pointers for avoiding unintended anti-Jewish bias and for highlighting positive observations about Judaism which might otherwise go unnoticed.

Advent and messianic hope

“Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas, when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered; and as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s second coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.”

(General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar, n. 39)

Whilst significant differences in belief separate Christians and Jews, one thing they share is hope. Christians look forward to the *parousia* when Christ will come again and salvation will be manifested in all fullness. Many Jews look forward to a time when the just and merciful ways of God will be definitively established on earth. Meanwhile, in the journey towards that time, both Christians and Jews are committed as servants of God’s justice and peace.

The Second Vatican Council (*Nostra Aetate*, 4) put it this way: ‘... the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and “serve him shoulder to shoulder” (Soph. 3:9).’

Teaching on the theme of messianic hope during Advent might include the following comments:

- Whilst hope in a messiah is part of Judaism and held by many Jews today, there is no single ‘Jewish’ concept of the Messiah that is unanimously accepted.
- The idea that the Jews of Jesus’ time were all awaiting a political messiah and ‘missed’ the moment when Jesus came as a vulnerable child, is a simplistic take on Scripture. In fact, Judaism of Jesus’ day featured a complex array of messianic ideas and opinions.
- In the past, Christians have used messianic expectations as a reason to disparage Jewish belief. “Jews were often represented as damned by God and blind since they were unable to

recognise in Jesus the Messiah and bearer of salvation” (CRRJ, *Gifts & Calling*, 16). Today, however, the Church recognises the error of this ‘teaching of contempt’ and, indeed, repents of it.

- Further, we can admit that the Jewish position is correct in its assessment when it points out that many prophecies in Scripture have *not* been fulfilled; salvation is *not* clearly obvious when one looks at the state of the world with its terrible injustices and sufferings. As Christians, our faith in the victorious Christ must also acknowledge that salvation is still unfolding in history; the Reign of God is ‘now’, and ‘not yet’.
- Just as Jews with messianic hope look to the future and actively work for the *healing of a wounded world* (the Hebrew term is *tikkun olam*), so are Christians called to give their lives in service of God’s reign as they look forward to Christ’s Second Coming. In this sense, and despite our significant differences, messianic hope can be a uniting factor for Christians and Jews. We wait together, and we work together, for the fullness of the world’s redemption.
- Martin Buber, a leading Jewish philosopher of the twentieth century, put it this way: “What is the difference between Jews and Christians? ... We all await the Messiah. You Christians believe that He has already come and gone, while we Jews do not. I, therefore, propose we await him together. And when he appears, we can ask Him, ‘So, were you here before?’ ... I hope that at that moment I will be close enough to whisper in his ear, ‘For the sake of heaven, don’t answer!’” [Cited in Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 354-55.]

Bibliography: Murray Watson, ‘Advent: Learning to Wait Together’, n.p.d.; Marilyn Salmon, *Preaching Without Contempt* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006); Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, ‘The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable’ (2015).