

EXCERPT



The Art of Living in Advent ***28 Days of Joyful Waiting***

September 2, 2025 | \$12.99, 104 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1138-6

Step into the Advent season with *The Art of Living in Advent*, a beautifully crafted daily devotional by Sylvie Vanhoozer, who blends Scripture, history, art, and reflection to enrich your spiritual preparation for Christmas.

Step into the Story of Advent

It all started for me when I was very young, through my childhood Christmases in Provence. I watched the crèche come into its own year after year, with each new Advent. I remember my mother, herself a Provençal villager, taking the santons out of their box, calling each figure by name, lovingly. Placing these santons (“little saints” in the original language of Provence where this custom originated), colorfully painted three-inch-high little clay figurines, was second nature (or nurture) to her. She seemed to know them, and their stories, as well as those of her own family. The baby Jesus, of whom I knew next to nothing at the time, was there too, in a manger that looked just like the typical stables of Provence with which I was familiar.

As Maman hummed the noëls (Provençal carols) that told stories about Jesus and the little clay figurines, I supposed they were all simply characters from folklore and legend. Yet, I also had a vague sense, and hope, that maybe something might very well have happened, that this baby Jesus, the center of attention in the manger, really might have come to Provence and, in so doing, somehow made us and our land extraordinary, even holy. Did Jesus come to us, or did we come to him? Was Provence special because its people had made room for the baby in the manger?

Such thoughts lingered in my imagination through the years of my tender childhood. I often found myself thinking of that baby, and of the stories about these villagers—the little saints—supposedly undertaking a nightlong search for him. I was not “churched.” I had never opened, or even seen, a Bible, or listened to Bible stories. Nevertheless, the crèche was sowing seeds in my mind and heart, as it still does each Advent in every home where the scenes prior to Jesus’ birth are set up and played out.

This is why I am still telling the stories that I first heard one Advent, a long time ago, in a faraway place: “the land of my ancestors.” People may wonder: Is Provence truly special, or is she embellishing or romanticizing it? And if it is special, should I move there and live among its people? I am not inviting readers to leave their place and go to some distant land in a distant past. The invitation is rather to transpose this Provençal scene into one’s own place, to live the same story in a different context. The invitation is to learn the art of watchful waiting for Christ anywhere and anytime: “One might have to invent a new art de vivre [art of living], one that is not a copy of the past but, in a new context, a return to the values behind it, that made this past worthy.” Précisément! The question is not “Did Jesus really come to Provence?” but rather “Could Jesus really come here, to me?” Could my home, my neighborhood, my church, become a crèche scene, with Christ right here beside me, in me? Come and see!

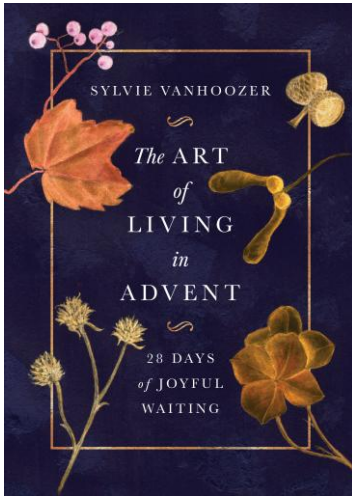


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I invite you to slow down as you read this book, to reimagine the Christmas holidays as Advent holy-days. Think of Advent not as a door one passes through to something more exciting but as a tableau vivant or “living picture,” into which one enters, a series of scenes from another time and place, where people live at a gentler pace. These scenes of santons, and of the botanical world that God gives us, invite both attention and reflection. The tableau is composed of four scenes, one for each week, in which you will watchfully wait for God’s presence and activity—in your place, in your stories, in solitude, and in company, respectively. The seven days of each week have prayers, questions, and projects that encourage you to practice the art of living in Advent. Think of them as spiritual exercises for becoming adventish: the quality of a person who knows how to watch and wait with joy, with expectant faith in Jesus’ presence and activity, regardless of the circumstances. As you read, then, “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7).

My hope and prayer is that by the time you finish reflecting on these scenes, you will step into a world that has been not simply reenchanting, but charged with the grandeur of God, a world in which you do not simply observe the manger scene and its characters at a distance, but see yourself as part of that same story, not a static figure but a live character. I hope you will come to see yourself as not a little but an everyday saint, embarked on a pilgrimage through spaces and times made holy thanks to the advent of Christ in you.

—adapted from the introduction



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