

An Advent Meditation with Richard Rohr
Unedited Transcript

I'd like to share with you today something that I'd bet most of you don't know. In the first 1200 years of Christianity the great feast, hands-down, was Easter, the holy week leading up to it, leading up to the celebration of the resurrection of Christ. But around 1200, a new man entered the scene called Francis of Assisi and he felt we didn't need to wait for God to love us by the cross and resurrection. In fact, he thought it started with love and he popularized what you and I take for granted today as the big Christian feast, Christmas. But Christmas only started being popular in the 13th century, and it was my order, the Franciscans, frankly, who made it popular. Now, the main point I want to make is the theological switch that took place, that we realized if God had become flesh, taken on materiality, physicality, humanity, then the problem was solved from the beginning. Francis even celebrated Christmas so much, we fasted in those days most of the days of the week. And he said, "On Christmas Day even the walls should eat meat." That's how much he went wild over Christmas. He said, "Every tree should be decorated with lights to show that it's filled with light anyway." And that's exactly what we do 800 years later. But remember when we speak of the Advent or waiting for Christmas or preparing for Christmas, we're not talking about waiting for a little baby Jesus to be born. That already happened 2000 years ago. We're in fact welcoming the Universal Christ, the Cosmic Christ, the Christ that is for ever being born in the human soul and into history. And believe me we do have to make room for that, because right now there is no room in the inn for such a mystery. We see things pretty much in their physicality, materiality, but we don't see the light shining through. We don't see the incarnate spirit that is hidden inside of everything material. So, one final point, because we—even though Francis was a miracle worker here in opening up our eyes, he was a part of the Western Church, and in the Eastern Church, which most people in the United States and Western Europe aren't familiar with, they made it very clear that the incarnation was a universal principal. It was not just, God became Jesus, but it was that God said yes to the material universe. God said yes to physicality. They understood the mystery of incarnation in the universal sense, and that's what you and I, I think, are still preparing for. That's the eternal advent. It's always advent. We're always waiting to see spirit revealing itself through matter. We're always waiting for matter to become a new kind of apparition in which spirit is revealed. Whenever that happens you're celebrating Christmas. So, for me it's pretty logical that Christmas became the great celebratory feast of Christians because it's basically saying it's good to be human, it's good to be on this earth, it's good to be flesh, it's good to have emotions, it's good to have sexuality. We don't need to be ashamed of any of this. This is what God loves. So, Merry Christmas without any hesitation. Thank you.