

November 28, 2021

# Come to the Banquet

Isaiah 25:6-10; 55:1-3

As Advent begins, people all over the world anticipate the coming of Jesus into the world. It's an excellent time to evaluate our practices of preparing to be in God's presence and to be honest about the current effectiveness of those methods for us. Prayer, Communion, church services, devotional readings, and other traditional means are tried-and-true ways of encountering God. At times, though, something a little more imaginative might be in order.

In 2015, the Churches Conservation Trust in England came up with a way to help fund restoration of churches that were "redundant" (which in the UK means "not being used"), while also allowing visitors a unique experience. Some churches across the country date back 1,000 years. It's no surprise, then, that these churches no longer host services and can be rudimentary in their amenities (no electricity or running water). So the Conservation Trust came up with the idea of "champing," or church camping.

For about \$80 per person, solo travelers, families, or groups can rent an historic church for the night. Each church comes with camping cots, battery-powered candles, and full use of the building. "Church camping was the bright idea of Peter Aiers, one of the trust's regional directors. He says that churches embody hundreds of years of British history, and are beautiful buildings to boot, so what better way to appreciate them than spending a night in one? And have it all to yourselves."<sup>1</sup> I would go one step further and posit, What better way to experience God's presence in a new way than to meditate, pray, and sleep in a place where believers from hundreds of years ago also met with God?

We begin Advent in a unique point in time. It gives us the chance to look at our faith with new eyes and be honest about what's effective and what isn't. If your daily prayer life seems lacking or stale, try a new method, such as walking a labyrinth or *Lectio Divina*. If you don't feel as close to God as you once did, maybe a night's sleep inside a 500-year-old country church will give you a jolt. Be real about where your relationship with God is right now and, whatever the practice, make an effort to take a step closer toward God's throne this Advent.

1. Would you like to spend the night in a centuries-old British church? Why or why not?
2. How do you expect this Advent to differ from pre-2020?
3. Think of one way you can grow nearer to God this holiday season. Describe it.

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<sup>1</sup>From [theguardian.com/travel/2015/may/29/camping-weekend-in-church-kent-church-conservation-trust](http://theguardian.com/travel/2015/may/29/camping-weekend-in-church-kent-church-conservation-trust).