ALL CREATION WAITS

WRITTEN BY
Gayle Boss

ILLUSTRATED BY
Sharon Spitz

ALL CREATION WAITS

The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings



PARACLETE PRESS
BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

2026 First Printing This Edition

All Creation Waits — Deluxe Edition: The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings

Text copyright © 2016, 2026 by Gayle Lynn Boss
Illustrations copyright © 2023 by Sharon Spitz

ISBN 979-8-89348-076-4

The Paraclete Press name and logo (dove on cross) are trademarks of Paraclete Press, Inc.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026933965

URLs shown in the Quotation Sources were accessed February 13, 2026.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in an electronic retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published by Paraclete Press
Brewster, Massachusetts
www.paracletepress.com
Printed in China

For Joey, our winter's new and glowing light.
—*G.B.*

For my beloved dog Ketem, 2011–2023.
—*S.S.*



Contents

Introduction		xi
Note to the Reader		xix
ADVENT 1	Painted Turtle	1
ADVENT 2	Muskrat	7
ADVENT 3	Black Bear	13
ADVENT 4	Chickadee	19
ADVENT 5	Whitetail Deer	25
ADVENT 6	Honey Bee	31
ADVENT 7	Chipmunk	37
ADVENT 8	Cottontail	43
ADVENT 9	Common Loon	49
ADVENT 10	Wood Frog	55
ADVENT 11	Raccoon	61
ADVENT 12	Little Brown Bat	67
ADVENT 13	Opossum	73

ADVENT 14	Wild Turkey	79
ADVENT 15	Common Garter Snake	85
ADVENT 16	Woodchuck	91
ADVENT 17	Striped Skunk	97
ADVENT 18	Porcupine	103
ADVENT 19	Common Eastern Firefly	109
ADVENT 20	Meadow Vole	115
ADVENT 21	Eastern Fox Squirrel	121
ADVENT 22	Red Fox	127
ADVENT 23	Northern Cardinal	133
ADVENT 24	Lake Trout	139
CHRISTMAS DAY	Jesus, the Christ	145
Afterword		153
More Animal Wonderment		155
Acknowledgments		169
Quotation Sources		170



Every single creature is full of God
and is a book about God.

Every creature is a word of God.

If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature
—even a caterpillar—
I would never have to prepare a sermon.
So full of God is every creature.

—Meister Eckhart



Introduction

When our first son was a toddler I wanted to add an Advent calendar to our family's Advent practices. Before his birth we had already begun to take back late November and December from "the holiday season," doing a few things that, though very simple, startled family and friends. We'd given up colored lights and Christmas decorations for four candles on an Advent wreath, only putting the decorations up, with the tree, on Christmas Eve. We waited until then, too, to sing or play or listen to Christmas carols, keeping quiet except to sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" each evening around the lit wreath. Now and then someone dared to ask us why our home was so un-Christmasy.

More people asked more pointedly after our son was born—as if we were denying him some essential of childhood.

We decided to strip down and step back after I read a few paragraphs in a rather dry tome on the history of Christian liturgy. Those paragraphs worked in me like fingers lining up the cylinders of a lock. I still remember the click when that internal lock popped open.

I learned that the roots of Advent run deep beneath the Christian church—in the earth and its seasons. Late autumn, in the northern hemisphere, brings the end of the growing season. When early agricultural peoples had harvested their crops and stacked food in their larders, they gave a collective sigh of relief. Their long days in the fields were over. For their labor they had heaps of fruits, vegetables, grains, and meat. The group body called out, Feast!

At the same time, no matter how glad the party, they couldn't keep from glancing at the sky. Their growing season was over because the sun had retreated too far south to keep the crops alive. Each day of the fall they watched the light dwindle, felt the warmth weaken. It made them anxious, edgy. Throughout December, as the sun sank and sank to its lowest point on their horizon, they felt the shadow of primal fear—fear for survival—crouching over them. They were feasting, and they were fearful, both. When they had eaten up the crop they were feasting on, how would another crop grow? Yes, last year the sun had returned to their sky. But what if, this year, it didn't?

Despite their collective memory, people wedded, bodily, to the earth couldn't help but ask the question. Their bodies, in the present tense, asked the question.

Our bodies still ask that question. In December the dark and cold deepen, and our rational minds dismiss it as nothing. We know that on December 21, the winter solstice, the sun will begin its return to our sky. But our animal bodies react with dis-ease. The light—life—is going. Some of us sink into a seasonal depression. Some of us cope by seizing distractions the marketplace gleefully offers: shopping, parties, more shopping.

To be sure, some part of "the holiday season" is celebration of the harvest, for us, as it was for our ancestors, even if we don't personally harvest crops. We throw a party to mark the end of another year, sometimes with glad gratitude, often as incantation for a better year to come. We do this in a big, bright, loud way. But for us also, as for our ancestors, the dark end of the year brings unrest. It is an end. It comes without our asking and makes plain how little of life's course we control. This uncertainty, we don't know how to mark. And so it marks us. We feel weighted, gloomy even, and we feel guilty because voices everywhere in myriad ways sing out, "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year."

Uncertainty envelops all of us now, all year long. Global epidemics, Earth heaving under the cataclysms of climate change, eruptions of

human violence—ironically, perhaps we in this technological century are coming to sense our powerlessness against death and loss as keenly as our medieval ancestors. With them, we feel that weight most heavily in the dark of year's end.

The church history book that got hold of me told me that my own annual December sadness was no reason for guilt. It was a sign of being wide awake in the world, awake enough to feel loss in its many forms. Furthermore, it offered a way to engage that sadness. That way was Advent.

The early Fathers of the Christian church read the ebbing of light and life each year as a foreshadowing of the time when life as we know it will end completely. That it will end they sensed as pointedly as we, to whom it may seem more menacingly imminent. And it rightly terrifies us. To their and our abiding fear of a dark ending the church spoke of an *adventus*: a coming. Faith proclaimed, *When life as we know it goes, this year and at the end of all years, One comes, and comes bringing a new beginning.*

Advent, to the church Fathers, was the right naming of the season when light and life are fading. They urged the faithful to set aside four weeks to fast, give, and pray—all ways to strip down, to let the bared soul recall what it knows beneath its fear of the dark: that there is One who is the source of all life and is ever creating, One who comes to be with us and in us, even, especially, in darkness and death. One who brings a new beginning.

This is Christian tradition at its best, moving in step with creation. When the sun's light and heat wane, the natural world lets lushness fall away. It strips down. All energy is directed to the essentials that ensure survival. Advent's stripping practices—fasting, giving away, praying—tune us into the rhythms humming in the cells of all creatures living in the northern hemisphere. We tune into our own essential rhythms.

So when I wanted to add an Advent calendar to our practice, I looked for one that would, like fasting, giving away, and praying, help us enjoin earth's seasonal rhythm. The ones I found featured either a thumbnail-sized cast of the Nativity behind the daily doors or pictures of candy canes and gift packages. They were Christmas calendars, not Advent calendars. I was looking for daily miniatures that were less about Christ's human birth and more about the *need* for that birth. I wanted my little boy, opening each door, to sense that Advent is about darkness—and hope. Fear—and hope. Loss—and hope.

Pregnant with my second child, I set about making an Advent calendar. The pictures I found myself drawing behind the little cut-out doors were of creatures. Behind door number one, a turtle at the bottom of a pond. Behind door number two, a diamond-skinned snake deep in the earth. Then a loon, a wild goose, a bear, a doe, a

crow . . . As a companion to the calendar I made a little book. Each December day after Kai opened a door, I read a bit of a poem or song or natural history that linked the creature behind that door to the heart of Advent: "Turtle is buried now in mud at the bottom of the pond. Encased in darkness, she is utterly still. She waits. . . ."

I drew a turtle behind the door of December 1 because, days before, my son's godmother had sent me her meditation on turtle as a symbol of the soul in its dark season. And because I knew my son, like all children, liked pictures of animals. Turtle opened the door for me to discover creature after creature waiting with wisdom about living in a dark time.

That was more than twenty-five Advents ago. Through the years I asked my boys only one question after we opened each day's door: *Why do we have a turtle on our Advent calendar? Why a bear? A loon?* They told me in their own words what caught their attention about that animal, making its wisdom their own at every age. Year after year we saw how a healthy soul responds to encroaching darkness. And that there's more than one response. There's the turtle response, the loon response, black bear's response. When that primal fear of the dark—of an end—begins to slide over us, animals unselfconsciously and forthrightly offer unfearful responses. They take in the threat of dark and cold, and they adapt in many amazing and ingenious ways. They shape themselves to life as it is given. All of them enact heart

and soul realities for us. Each in its way says: *The dark is not an end, but a door. This is the way a new beginning comes.*

The practice of Advent has always been about helping us absorb the mystery that death, without fail, opens to a new beginning. Other-than-human creatures—sprung, like us, from the Source of Life—manifest this mystery without question or doubt. In a world that is unraveling, turning and lurching into new patterns and forms, they're waiting with reliable guidance.

The more I'm with animals and the more I learn from them, the more I know they can be more than our companions on this planet. They can be our guides. They can be to us "a book about God . . . a word of God," the God who comes, even in the darkest season, to bring us a new beginning.



Note to the Reader

Long, long before there were any written words, there were animals—and all the rest of the teeming natural world. Creation is the earliest sacred text given to us. Like Scripture, the natural world, too, opens up an infinite universe of meaning.

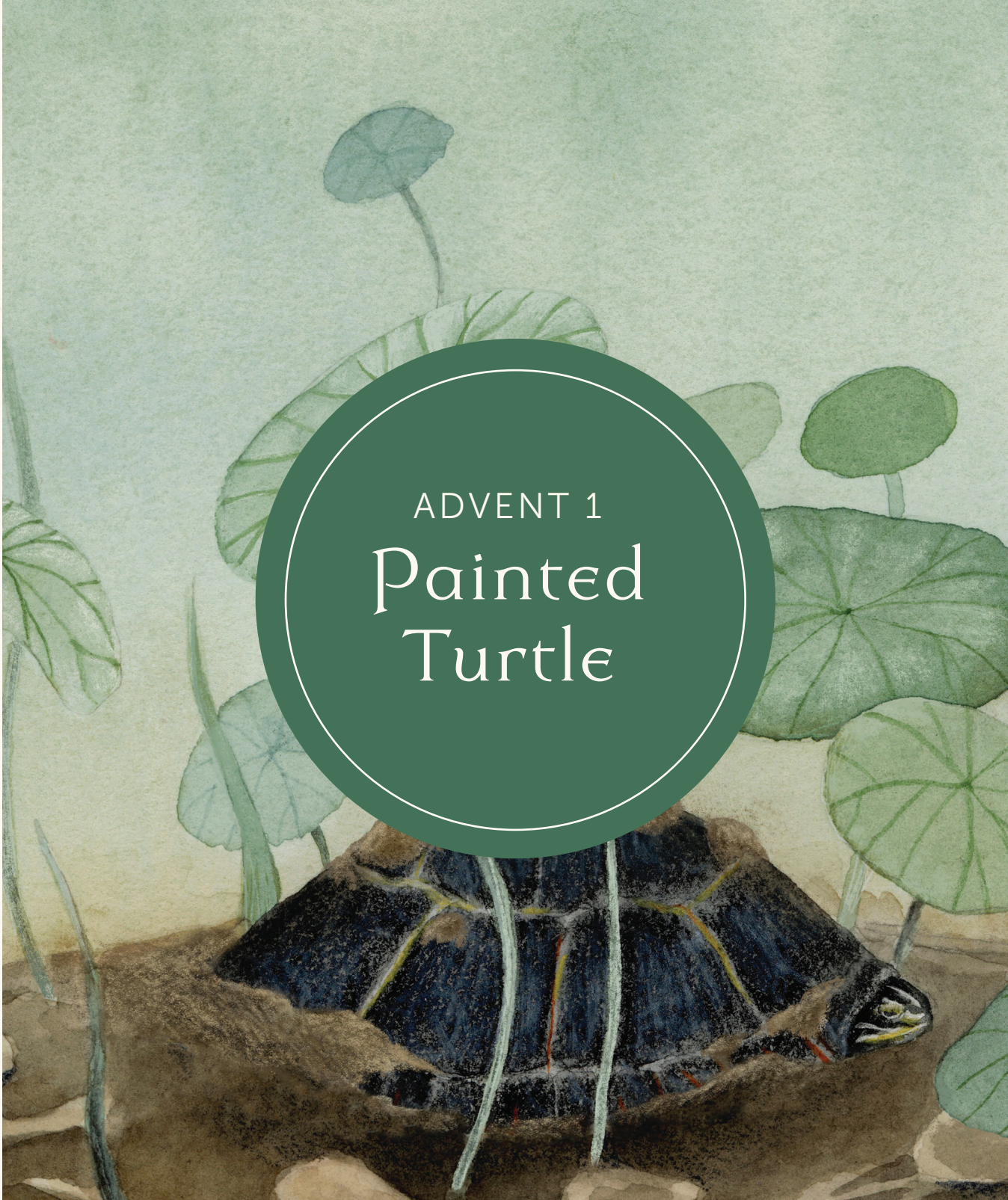
Early wisdom seekers gave us a way of reading sacred texts called *lectio divina*. It's a way that honors the richness of the text and the dignity of the reader. Reading or listening, we simply ask, *What catches my attention?* No one gets caught in quite the same way.

Then, if we give that attention-getting bit our best awareness, if we tell ourselves or each other what in the text stopped us in our tracks, and wonder about that, something mysterious happens. A

door opens. We sense a path connecting the world of the text to the world of our own experience; we feel a nudge or hear a voice inviting us to explore that path.

The sacred text of the natural world opens its doors—hidden in plain sight—to anyone who "reads" it with an attentive heart. Over and over it happens that one of our creature-kin comes with a word for our unsettled selves. Firefly, loon, chickadee, raccoon—any one of them might be the teacher we need.

What catches my attention? Ask only that as you read the animals' stories. In your own and others' responses you may sense a door—often one you didn't know you were looking for—opening. And through that door, a path, and down that path, the glimmer of a new beginning.


ADVENT 1
Painted
Turtle



But ask the animals—they will teach you—
and the birds in the air—they will tell you;
or speak to the earth—it will teach you—
and the fish in the sea will inform you.

—Job 12:7–8

ADVENT 1

Painted Turtle

The day is bright and warm for December 1, but the logs in the marsh pond are bare. Spring to summer into early fall they served, on sunny days, as spa to a dozen or so painted turtles. I would see them basking, splay-legged, stretching their leathery necks out full length, avid for every luscious atom of sunlight and sun-warmth.

Out of sight now, they've not escaped the harsher cold that's coming.

The water is maybe waist-deep in this pond, but a murky soup, clogged with roots and plants. One day in the fall, as water and air cooled, at some precise temperature an ancient bell sounded in the



turtle brain. A signal: *Take a deep breath.* Each creature slipped off her log and swam for the warmer muck bottom. Stroking her way through the woven walls of plant stems, she found her bottom place. She closed her eyes and dug into the mud. She buried herself.

And then, pulled into her shell, encased in darkness, she settled into a deep stillness. Her heart slowed—and slowed—almost to stopping. Her body temperature dropped—and stopped just short of freezing. Now, beneath a layer of mud, beneath the weight of frigid water and its skin of ice and skim of snow, everything in her has gone so still she doesn't need to breathe. And anyway, the iced-over pond will soon be empty of oxygen. Sunk in its bottom-mud, for six months she will not draw air into her lungs. To survive a cold that would kill her, or slow her so that predators would kill her, she slows herself beyond breath in a place where breath is not possible.

And waits. As ice locks in the marsh water and howling squalls batter its reeds and brush, beneath it all she waits. It is her one work, and it is not easy. Oxygen depletion stresses every particle of her. Lactic acid pools in her bloodstream. Her muscles begin to burn—her heart muscle, too, a deadly sign. That acid has to be neutralized, and calcium is the element to do it. Out of her bones, then out of her shell, her body pulls calcium, slowly dissolving her structure, her shape, her strength. But to move to escape—requiring breath—in a place where there is no oxygen—that would suffocate her. So, though

she is dissolving, every stressed particle of her stays focused on the silver bead of utter quietude.

It's this radical simplicity that will save her. And deep within it, at the heart of her stillness, something she has no need to name, but something we might call trust: that one day, yes, the world will warm again, and with it, her life.


ADVENT 2
Muskrat