

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

Each year, as we begin Advent, we enter into a time of watching and waiting – of anticipation and hope.

And each year on this day, we begin FOUR weeks of waiting and preparation – preparation to celebrate once again the BIRTH of Jesus.

Yet, even as we set our hearts and minds on getting ready for that little baby in Bethlehem, we start the season with signs and calamities and the “Day of the Lord.”

It's enough to make us wonder, how do we harmonize Luke's image of Jesus' return at the end of time “with power and great glory” to the Christmassy stories of the infant Jesus, tender and mild, awaiting us at the end of the Advent season?

Yet, each Advent we begin by focusing on Jesus **Second Coming** as we prepare to celebrate his first.

As one scholar put it, “Like Mary, we celebrate the coming of the Christ child, what God has already done.

- “And we wait in expectation of the forthcoming of God's reign on earth and for the return of Christ, what God will yet do.” (Synthesis p.3)

I. Second Coming

A. So, as we “Wait for the Lord” – both long ago and yet to come – we begin with an “apocalyptic vision foretelling the cataclysmic events that will precede the arrival of the Son of Man at the end of history to complete God's work of redemption.”

1. The Prophet Jeremiah lived during a chaotic time – Israel was defeated and the people were being exiled to Babylon – everything they knew or thought they knew was in shambles.

2. Yet, in this desperate time, **Jeremiah** held out the promise that God would set things right once again.

3. As we hear in our OT lesson, **Jeremiah** foretells of one who will save Israel and Judah and restore God’s justice and righteousness.

- *“In those days and at that time,”* says the Lord, *“I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”*

B. This is the same theme that is behind our Gospel reading, when in the midst of a terrifying cosmic upheaval, the Son of Man comes with power and glory in a cloud to bring about God’s reign on earth.

1. Like the cloud at the Transfiguration and at the Ascension, this cloud manifests the Divine presence.

2. Here Jesus comes as the victorious messianic Lord who has control over the chaotic forces of the world.

3. To Jesus’ followers his coming at the end of time is not a catastrophe but the completion of God’s reign “on earth as it is in heaven.”

4. Jesus tells his followers to “**STAND UP** and **RAISE** your heads,” because their redemption has come – that redemption the Thessalonians were expecting any day in our NT reading.

5. So Jesus’ followers are to respond with **HOPE** – for this Second Coming will bring their redemption.

6. And thus **HOPE** is one of the great themes of Advent.

II. Living in Hope

A. So how are we to live in this in-between time?

- This time between Jesus' first coming and his second?

1. We like Jesus' first followers are to live in HOPE – HOPE and EXPECTATION that God keeps God's promises and will send that Righteous One to right the wrongs of the world.

2. The good news of Advent is not simply that Christ is coming, but that his coming means that WE can HOPE, despite all that is falling apart in our lives.

3. As one scholar put it, *“The grace of the season of Advent is a reawakening of our HOPE in the salvation that has already come, that comes now, and will come in the fullness of the ‘Day of the Lord.’* (Synthesis p.2)

B. Yet, in the aftermath of a pandemic – when we hear news of yet another new strain of the virus – it can be difficult to even find HOPE.

1. How do we move ahead? How can we possibly celebrate Christmas?

2. After all we lost last year, one might be tempted to adopt a “business as usual” attitude and charge right ahead with the holidays at full speed.

3. But we need to be careful that we are not trying to deny what happened and bury it in holiday trappings.

4. The danger of this is that if we don't deal with our emotions, and work through our feelings, they will just bubble up to the surface in some other way – and the holiday season is the perfect time for that to happen, at just the wrong moment.

5. So, we need to be aware of what we're feeling and deal with it in appropriate ways.

C. And that is where **Advent** can help us.

1. Before we rush ahead to Christmas, we can take the time to slow down and be aware of our surroundings and of the needs and pain of others—those whom we know and those we don't.

2. Rather than rushing headlong into the materialistic nature of Christmas, we can focus instead on its deeper, more spiritual meaning.

3. Rather than focusing on ourselves, we can focus on those who have lost and are lost.

4. One thing we CAN do is to celebrate **hope**, and work to bring hope to those around us.

5. Advent, as I said, is a season of **hope**.

- That's one of the reasons the color for Advent is blue—the color of hope.

6. “Behold, I make all things new,” says the Lord (Rev. 21:5), and so in Advent, we, too, look forward, in hope, to the coming reign of God “on earth as it is in heaven.”

7. And even as we do, we also remember the God who loves us so much that God would come to live with us, to teach us and save us, as a little baby in Bethlehem.

8. And so, by living INTO Advent – we can find our Advent HOPE.

III. Advent Response

A. This Advent, as you strive to bring HOPE to those in your life, take advantage of the several opportunities we have to slow down a bit and contemplate God's great gift of hope that we celebrate this time of year.

1. Visit our **Advent table** in the narthex with its variety of items for each member of your household to help ponder God's great gift and get ready for Christmas.

2. Spend some extra time in Bible reading or some other spiritual reading.

3. Come for *Lectio Divina* on Monday evenings as we look at the Gospel reading for the upcoming Sunday.

4. Our **Celtic Contemplative Prayer** (December 14) will focus on preparing for Christmas and on the Advent table there is a booklet for an **Advent Guided Labyrinth Walk**.

5. If you haven't had a chance to experience our **Taizé Prayer**, Advent might be a good time to do so – you can find it on our Facebook page or YouTube channel.

6. And, of course, we will have our service of **Lessons & Carols** in two weeks.

- Through the readings and songs, we trace the prophecies of the Messiah and hear again the story of Jesus' birth.

7. All of these are wonderful ways to help us refocus on what we are celebrating.

B. If you are a more “DOING” person – there are some ways of “DOING” Advent too.



1. Once again, the tree in the Narthex is loaded with tags to by presents for the families living at **RAIN**.

2. Or you can pick up a couple of bags of mini chocolates for the Youth Authority Christmas bags.

3. As you go about the tasks of getting ready for Christmas, use them focus on brining HOPE to those you meet – as you prepare your heart for the coming of Christ.

Conclusion

Bottom line – the question for us is: What are you especially hoping for in these coming weeks?

How might you prepare for Christmas in the days ahead:

- Not just physically (that's important too) but Spiritually?

How will you bring HOPE in the coming days – hope in your life and in the life of another?

Let Us Pray

Urgent God, breaking through the static to speak to our hearts: disarm our love of control and shake the silent heavens to reveal your dawning glory, judging all in the light of love; through Jesus Christ, the one who is to come. AMEN.

(Shakespeare p. 79)