

“Advent, The Season For Preparation”

Advent 1-B November 30, 2008

1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37

Introduction:

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is the first of seven seasons that together make up the church year. Advent is always the four Sundays that precede Christmas and also includes Christmas Eve. The traditional color for Advent is royal purple, but it can also include deep blue.

Advent is a season of mixed themes or central focuses. The word Advent – which was first used by the Church Council of Tours in 567 A.D. – comes from Latin and has to do with the idea of “coming”. The season is therefore a time of preparation and expectation for the coming celebration of the birth of Christ and His bodily return at the end time in “great power and glory”.

So, one theme is to prepare ourselves for the birth or rebirth of Jesus in our souls. The second theme is to make sure we are living as those prepared for the return of Christ so that we are not like the bridesmaids who did not make adequate preparations for their lamps’ oil and were shut out of the wedding banquet by the very groom for whom they were lazily waiting. A third theme follows from the second.

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Advent is also a season of penitence. It is – like Lent a time for us to invite the Holy Spirit to examine our lives. If there be anything in our hearts, minds, spirits, habits, relationships, or controllable circumstances that we need to alter or we need to repent of, then we should call upon God to forgive us, and ask the Holy Spirit to sufficiently strengthen us so we can turn and go in God’s direction.

Down through the centuries, Christians have observed Advent as a time of expectation, preparation, and examination as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and expect His return.

Advent is also a time for us, who live in this day and time, to think of Jesus’ coming to earth, and of what His coming has meant to those who have known Him and loved Him across the centuries; and what His coming means to us personally.

Advent, then, is the time for us to prepare ourselves to celebrate the birthday of Christ so that He may “come to” us, and be born anew within our hearts and lives as we participate in all the Advent services leading to Christmas.

Christians who live in the United States draw from an inheritance from many countries around the world in observing Advent. In some homes, the days of Advent are

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marked with the use of an Advent Calendar. Many families who do not ordinarily have family devotions find times during the Advent season to read the Biblical stories, and to sing Advent hymns.

We have also inherited the tradition of the Christmas Tree, window lights and the singing of Christmas Carols. All of these traditions inform and assist our preparations for celebrating the coming of Jesus Christ and anticipating His return.

This morning, the first Sunday of Advent, lets

Examine The Advent Wreath

to help us understand the meaning of Advent , and thus help us to prepare our heart and lives for the birth of Christ.

Observe the Advent Wreath. It is a wreath of greenery with four candles set in its circle and one candle in the center. Notice these things about the Advent Wreath:

First, it is round. This symbolizes the eternity of God. God always was, always is, and always will be. A circle – which has no beginning and no end – is the perfect symbol of God’s eternal nature.

Secondly, notice the wreath is made of greenery to symbolize the new life that the eternal God has given to a dying world. The Bible says: *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a*

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new creation, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”

Thirdly, within this round, green wreath are set four candles. They stand for the Prophecy, the Preparation, the Joy, and the Faith of the Christmas story. Three of the candles are royal purple, Advent’s liturgical color. The fourth candle is a joyous pink. Each of these candles are lit on a successive Sunday during Advent.

Finally, notice in the middle of the Advent Wreath is a larger, white candle. It symbolizes the Light of the world, Jesus Christ Himself. Let’s now

Examine Each Candle In Detail.

The First Candle of Advent is the candle of **Prophecy**. It symbolizes the anticipation of the Prophets who prophesied about Jesus’ birth and His return along with the prophecies of the New Testament.

For centuries Israel had looked for and longed for God’s Messiah, their Deliverer. The Prophets of Israel prophesied concerning His birth. One such prophet was Isaiah whom we heard from in today’s first lesson about the return of Christ, who also declared: *¹There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow*

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out of his roots. ²And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD ... ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanu-el (3:1-3a, 7:14).

As we light the first purple candle, let us sing the first verse of Hymn 56, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*.

The Second Candle is the purple candle of **Preparation**. This Bethlehem Candle reminds us of all the preparations God had to make for Christ's birth and the preparations God is still making for Jesus' return. We are reminded of these preparations as we listen to these words from Paul's letter to the Galatians (4:4-5) *⁴But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁵To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* Also, listen to these words from Luke 2:4-7, *⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be*

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enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. ⁷And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

As we light this second purple candle of Preparation, let us turn in our hymnal to p.101, and sing the first verse of *Away In A Manger*.

The Third Candle of Advent is the Shepherd's Candle and symbolizes the **Joy** that the birth of Christ brought into the world. Even now it's color, Pink, reminds us of this joy. This joy was first made known to a group of Shepherds out in the fields near Bethlehem, keeping watch over their flocks one night.

The joy of Christmas has to do with the fact that God's Son was born for the sake of "all the people" – for the entire world ("*For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" – John 3:16).

As we light the pink candle let us proclaim our joy as we sing the first verse of Hymn 100, *Joy To The World*.

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The Fourth Candle of Advent symbolizes the Faith that the birth of Christ brought into the world. It is the candle of the Wise Men who had the faith to follow that star until it rested over Christ's birthplace in Bethlehem (Mat. 2:9-11). God lives by faith, and God expects us to do the same. God trusted His plan to save us from our sins. Now, God expects us to trust His savior – Jesus Christ – with our very souls. As we light this purple Faith Candle, let us turn to page 83, and sing the first verse of *O Come All Ye Faithful*.

The Fifth Candle symbolizes the reality of the birth of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. For centuries a dark and sinful world looked and longed for God to intervene in human history – to lighten the darkness of sin, so that humankind might see the way in which God would have us live our lives. Listen to these words describing Jesus' birth from John's Gospel: ¹⁴*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. ...* ⁴*In him was life, and the life was the light of men.* ⁵*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it* (1:14, 5-7).

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As we light the Christ Candle, let us sing the second verse of hymn 111, *Silent Night*.

In Conclusion

Hear again the Word of God to each of us from Luke's Gospel: ⁴*As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

May Jesus be born anew, or for the first time in each of our lives this Advent. Amen?