

November 28, 2021 The First Sunday in Advent

Hymn 57 Lo! he comes with clouds descending

Lo! he comes with clouds descending, once for our salvation slain;
Thousand, thousand saints attending swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ the Lord returns to reign.

Those dear tokens of his passion still his dazzling body bears,
Cause of endless exultation to his ransomed worshipers;
With what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture,
Gaze we on those glorious scars!

Yea, amen! let all adore thee, high on thine eternal throne;
Savior, take the power and glory; claim the kingdom for thine own:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Thou shalt reign, and thou alone.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NhmuY2pRLY>

Lighting the Advent Wreath

Holy One, we praise you for your child Jesus Christ, who is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, the wisdom that teaches and guides us, the Savior of every nation. Let your blessing come upon us as we light this wreath. May it be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

O God of love, you are the true sun of the world, evermore rising and never going down. We pray you to shine in our hearts, that the darkness of sin and the mist of error being driven away, we may this day, and all our life long, walk without stumbling in the way you have prepared for us, which is Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God in glory everlasting. Amen

God of majesty and power, amid the clamor of our violence your Word of truth resounds; upon a world made dark by sin the Sun of Justice cast his dawning rays. Keep your household watchful and aware of the hour in which we live. Hasten the advent of that day when the sounds of war will be forever stilled, the darkness of evil scattered, and all your children gathered into one. We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day

draws near: your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever

Hymn S280 *Gloria in excelsis*

Glory to god in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

*Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,
You take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;*

You are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,

*You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
In the glory of God the Father, Amen.*

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Psalm 25

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul* Do not let me be put to shame;

O my God, in you I trust* Do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame* Let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways* O Lord; teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me* For you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord* And of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions* According to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord* Who instructs sinners in the way.

Who leads the humble in what is right* And teaches them all his ways.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness* For those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

LEVAS Hymn 103 Steal away to Jesus

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus!
Steal away, steal away home, I ain't got long to stay here!

My Lord calls me; he calls me by the thunder;
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul, I ain't got long to stay here. [Refrain]

Green trees are bending; poor sinner stands a-trembling;
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul, I ain't got long to stay here. [Refrain]

My Lord calls me, he calls me by the lightning,
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul, I ain't got long to stay here. [Refrain]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wo0A0f9b6fU>

Luke 21:25-36

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Waiting For Today -- Advent 1C

Gracious Creator, in this Advent of expectation, draw us together in unity, that our praise and worship might echo in these walls and also through our lives. In this Advent of expectation, draw us together in mission, that the hopes within us might be the songs we sing: the melodies of our lives. In this Advent of expectation, draw us together that the paths of service we follow might lead us from a lowly stable to a glorious eternity with you. Amen.

Thanks be to God for this Advent, oh so old and always new, ever changing, ever true. Our stories this morning speak to us of the challenging and humbling but glorious experience of being in need, in need of God’s loving care. They speak of what it feels like to acknowledge ourselves as ever to be hungry and parched until we bring ourselves to the table and the wellspring of God’s love.

Just as in Lent, there is, of course an expectancy in Advent, that sees a

great and momentous occurrence at season's end. But in Advent, it's harder to feel this as waiting when we seem to be celebrating Christmas the minute Thanksgiving is over. Some stores just say the heck with it and start their stampedes on Thanksgiving Day or even before. So the advertisements trumpet, "Get ready for Xmas, come shop at 'so and so's.'" Strident means of influencing our shopping seem a far cry from joyfully announcing the holy festival Christmas once signified. Waiting during Advent sometimes seems more like revving up than contemplating.

There is an irony to our waiting that we seem to overlook if we're not careful. We celebrate Jesus' coming into the World by the power of the Holy Spirit, but in order to celebrate, we must know that He is already here. If we are to be Christians in thought word and deed, we are meant to always be aware of the Incarnation, always aware of the Passion, and always "Easter People" too, as the saying goes. So why set a day for Christmas at all? Why wait?

There are some practical reasons. Long about the darkest days of the year, it's awfully nice to have something like Christmas to look forward to. The psychologists will tell you we tend to be glummer the grimmer the weather. Hence the symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder: SAD. Since time immemorial, human societies have recognized the winter solstice as a yearly pivot point and thus a cause for celebration. From now on, the days grow longer and the sun grows stronger; things start looking up. So it is no great mystery that, among the followers of Jesus, whose appearance was perhaps the greatest turning point in history, the season agreed upon for the commemoration of Jesus' birth is this one. If Christianity had spread southward first, instead of northward, Christmas might have come in June. Also, for a system that runs on commerce, it's practical to have a strong reason to encourage buying. We know it is more blessed to give than to receive, but both are fun. Xmas in advertising, however, is more than fun, and less than we can easily make sense of.

Lest we dismiss Christmas shopping as secular and therefore vaguely sinful, or at least irrelevant to the God-fearing, we should bear in mind that ways and means of being happy – in moderation -- are very much

good for our souls; they truly are part of God's plan for us. But then why must Christmas be holy too? With all these other reasons for Christmas, why are we here on this First Sunday of Advent wondering, talking and singing about the imminent arrival of God's very self among us, the long-expected Jesus, the much-heralded One who will fulfill God's promise made to Israel, pluck our feet out of the net, and teach us the ways we should choose; who will come in a cloud descending to let us know our redemption is at hand?

Why indeed, if Jesus is always going to show up, why are we waiting? For one thing, patience and expectation are good practice. There are few subjects about which more ink has been spilled, more rhetoric spoken, more tales spun than the question of When: "How long, O Lord, will this go on?" "When will we be free?" The scholars say that St. Paul and the early Christians assumed that the final days and the return of Jesus in glory were practically upon them. At any minute, things stood to get exceedingly hairy and all the fertilizer would hit the big fan in the sky. Jeremiah predicted it; Luke brought it into even sharper focus: There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. But it hadn't happened then, and it hasn't happened yet.

The Left-Behinders would have us believe that something is about to happen, really soon, for real this time, but they miss the point. Ask anybody along the Yangtze or in New Orleans if the waters have done any roaring lately. Ask anybody in Syria or Ethiopia if there are wars or only rumors of wars. Today especially, ask any of the 5 million families who have lost someone to COVID19 whether there are plagues. Look at these things and wonder if the end times are somewhere in the unknown future, or if there might be another explanation.

Then Jesus told them a parable: "Look at the fig trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you know that Summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the Kingdom of God is near." Well the fig tree sprouts every year, God willing. Fig trees have been

sprouting ever since Jesus uttered those words; they sprouted long before, too. Not only that, winds and waves and wars and plagues have been taking lives all along. “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.” In other words, these are the good old days, but these are the bad new days too. “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and the day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap.”

Now we all know that believing in the love of God in Christ alone may not help you breathe if you’ve got the virus; you may need a ventilator. Jesus knew about natural disasters too. He came here to show us what to do in the face of plagues and wars and waves and winds and fire. Jesus’ admonition to wake up and be God’s people is today’s business. For Jesus is always coming – every year, every day. We remind ourselves of this especially at Advent time, when our spiritual journey is heightened by the excitement of intentional waiting for the glory of Christmas. But we remind ourselves best by remembering who we are, people of love. What we are waiting for is the start of a new day, a day in which we have the joy of going about business as usual.

Today we begin a time of being particularly intentional about the ends we seek in life. C. S. Lewis once famously said, “Don’t waste time bothering whether you love your neighbor; just act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets: When you are behaving as if you loved someone you will presently come to love them.” He was talking to us.

It is said that, back in the early days of the nation, it happened that one day, while the Connecticut House of Representatives was in session, a great storm blew up outside the windows of their meeting hall. The sky grew dark with terrible flashes of lightning and deafening thunderclaps. As the wind howled and the trees were straining and breaking, it started to hail and panes of glass began to crash into the room. The members of the House were understandably alarmed. Some of the more religiously volatile of their number began to assert that the final day was upon them. A group of these gathered around

Colonel Davenport, the Speaker of the House, demanding that he adjourn the session so they might go home and prepare themselves for the Judgment that was upon them. Without a pause, Davenport replied, “Gentlemen, the Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I should like to be found doing my duty. I therefore ask instead that more candles be brought to increase our light.”

As many as there are kinds of birds and shells and trees and people in God’s World, so many are the varieties of service and opportunities for neighbor love in each of our lifetimes. This Advent of expectation, the question is not, is Jesus going to show up, the question is, are we? “Therefore,” so that we might better see the variety of opportunities before us, “let more candles be brought, and may they increase our light!”

The Prayers of the People

I ask your prayers for God’s people throughout the world; for this gathering; and for all ministers and people. Pray for the Church. *Silence*

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people. Pray for justice and peace. *Silence*

I ask your prayers for all those in need of healing and strength, especially_____. Pray for the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and those in prison and all those in any need or trouble. *Silence*

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or deeper self-knowledge and faith. Pray that they may find and be found by Christ. *Silence*

I ask your prayers for the departed, especially those we name now, silently or aloud_____. Pray for those who have died. *Silence*

I ask your prayers of thanksgiving for the blessings of this life, especially those we name now, silently or aloud_____ *Silence*

Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honoured. Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day by ordering our lives according to his Word. Amen.

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The Confession

Almighty and most merciful God, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto humankind in Christ Jesus our Lord; and grant, O most merciful God, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

Hymn 66 Come thou long expected Jesus

Come, thou long expected Jesus born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child, and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOvq--0hkcg>

Now may the One who loved the world enough to send the first and only child to live among us in great humility, open your eyes to look for the day when that child comes again. And thus the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer be with you today and remain with you always. ***Amen.***

Tripping over Joy

What is the difference
Between your experience of Existence
And that of a saint?

The saint knows
That the spiritual path
Is a sublime chess game with God

And that the Beloved
Has just made such a Fantastic Move

That the saint is now
Tripping over Joy
And bursting out in Laughter
And saying, "I surrender!"

Whereas my dear,
I'm afraid you still think

You have a thousand serious moves.

Hafiz

Hafiz (1350-1390) was a Persian lyric poet whose works are regarded as a pinnacle of Persian literature. His works are often found in the homes of people in the Persian-speaking world, who learn his poems by heart and use them as everyday proverbs and sayings. His life and poems have become the subjects of much analysis, commentary and interpretation, influencing post-14th century Persian writing more than any other Persian author. He was a Sufi Muslim.