

## **The Sunday Missive – November 27, 2022**

### **The First Sunday in Advent**

#### **Hymn 433 We gather together**

We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;  
He chastens and hastens his will to make known;  
The wicked oppressing now cease from distressing;  
Sing praises to his Name; he forgets not his own.

Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,  
Ordaining, maintaining his kingdom divine;  
So from the beginning the fight we were winning;  
Thou, Lord, wast at our side: all glory be thine!

We all do extol thee, thou leader triumphant,  
And pray that thou still our defender wilt be.  
Let thy congregation escape tribulation:  
Thy Name be ever praised! O Lord, make us free!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmR1JszAM1E>

#### **The 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.*

#### **Isaiah 2:1-5**

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house

shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

## **Psalm 122**

I was glad when they said to me\* *Let us go to the house of the Lord.*

Now our feet are standing\* *Within your gates, O Jerusalem.*

Jerusalem is built as a city\* *That is at unity with itself*

To which the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord\* *The assembly of Israel, to praise the Name of the Lord.*

For there are the thrones of judgment\* *The thrones of the house of David.*

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem\* *May they prosper who love you.*

Peace be within your walls\* *And quietness within your towers.*

For my brethren and companions' sake\* *I pray for your prosperity.*

Because of the house of the Lord our God\* *I will seek to do you good.*

## **Romans 13:11-14**

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let

us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

### **497 How bright appears the morning star**

How bright appears the Morning Star,  
With mercy beaming from afar;  
The host of heaven rejoices;  
O righteous Branch, O Jesse's Rod!  
Thou Son of Man and Son of God!

We, too, will lift our voices: Jesus, Jesus! Holy, holy, yet most lowly,  
Draw thou near us; great Emmanuel, come and hear us.

Though circled by the hosts on high,  
He deigned to cast a pitying eye  
Upon his helpless creature;

The whole creation's Head and Lord,  
By highest seraphim adored,  
Assumed our very nature;  
Jesus, grant us, through thy merit, to inherit  
Thy salvation; hear, O hear our supplication.

Rejoice, ye heavens; thou earth, reply;  
With praise, ye sinners, fill the sky,  
For this his Incarnation. Incarnate God, put forth thy power,  
Ride on, ride on, great Conqueror, till all know thy salvation.  
Amen, amen! Alleluia, Alleluia!  
Praise be given evermore, by earth and heaven.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LInu\\_tmf4MM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LInu_tmf4MM)

### **Matthew 24:36-44**

Jesus said to the disciples, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the

Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

### **Wait for It -- Advent 1A**

Adventism, the attitude of expectancy, is far older than Christianity as a spiritual frame of reference. Today’s scriptures contain some of our most famously resonant phrases, all pointing towards what’s going to happen: Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light! Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. Let us go to the house of the Lord and pray for the peace of Jerusalem, when all shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.

All kinds of greatnesses will come about: the Lord’s mountain will be highest of all, people will come from all over to learn, and all will pray for peace. So let us start behaving as if we expected this to happen, despite the fact that we cannot know or predict when it will come about. If we don’t know when, surely we must start now.

How different this kind of expectant life is to the one we might lead without Jesus, just keepin on keepin on; waiting for retirement and death. Even if we ‘live for the moment,’ ‘one day at a time,’ and carpe the daylights out of our diems, along with the immediacy there is a finality: “If that’s all there is, my dear, let’s keep on dancing.” Contrast that with the sure and certain

knowledge of a day to come when all will be made well, God will be revealed in God's glory, and sorrow and sighing will cease.

It is not so surprising that this celebration of expectation, this practice of having happy waiting as a frame of reference, arose in ancient times as a response to the days getting shorter and shorter. People were struck with the fear that the days would just keep getting shorter until one day the sun would fail to rise at all. "Irrational," we say, we with our electric lights and furnaces and television sets. We don't know what dark is. Yet we do feel it when the nights draw in earlier and earlier. Most clichés exist because they're true, but "It's always darkest just before the dawn" isn't necessarily one of them. People repeat the saying to get help get through uncertain times, hoping it will be true. But in Advent, we are in the realm of 100% certainty. Just after the darkest night of the year comes Christmas, the dawn of Christ among us, every time. No matter what's going on, whatever we're going through, howsoever we respond to the invitation, one truth is always present: "Jesus shall reign where e'er the sun doth his successive journeys run; his kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more." Just ask Isaac Watts.

Contrary to another cliché, we can't really live for today nearly so fully if we think there's no tomorrow. Maybe there really is no life after death, but we can't behave the way we want to behave unless we have the expectation of a greater peace coming to pass sometime, somewhere in the history of Creation.

Pope Francis has released a position paper on the horrors of economic inequality in the world. Whatever else we might think of papal pronouncements and Roman Catholic dogma, we have to pay attention to this fellow and his inarguable point that anybody who really expects Christ to prevail and God to ultimately order the World will work towards justice and peace by helping the poor and hungry to live happier lives. If Christ is coming, what are we waiting for? If not us, who? If not now, when?

In anthropology, 'liminality' (from the Latin word *līmen*, meaning "threshold") is the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rituals, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet achieved the status they will hold when the ritual is complete. During a ritual's liminal stage, participants stand at the threshold between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way which the ritual establishes and validates.

Advent is one such liminal stage. We are on the threshold between one life and another: a life of instinct and a life of faith. Although we say the word of God existed before all other worlds, who knew it at the time? It is only when we become aware, when hearts and minds are opened to the possibilities; only then can humankind move towards cooperation with God's benevolent intention. The process is an individual one, and feels far from universal. Slowly, if we're lucky, we come to believe that God can do for us today what we cannot do for ourselves, and do for the World what seemed impossible. Advent is an interval of time, a space both in and out of time, a birth canal wherein we can, if we will, experience the coming into being of Christ in the flesh, in our very own flesh. When we experience it in ourselves, we become convinced that the World can also be healed and transformed.

Amongst the Jews, there are two mitzvahs – good things to do -- relating to the doorway of one's home and thereby of one's heart. A scroll is mounted on the doorpost of Jewish homes. It contains these words from the Book of Deuteronomy "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is thy God; the Lord is One." This scroll is inside a holder called a Mezuzah; it serves to identify the home as a place of divine presence: "God is here and we know it." The Mezuzah is usually small and unobtrusive, but beautifully decorated. One reaches out a few fingers when passing through the doorway and kisses them once they've made contact with the word of God. The mitzvah is a personal, unobtrusive, habitual way of literally keeping in touch with God. The other doorway-oriented tradition is the Menorah. Especially at Chanukah time, the lights of a

Menorah shining out from the doorway of a house – they didn't used to have any windows – served to light up the street, to light up the world beyond one's house, to so shine before others that they might give glory to God themselves.

In Advent, we might do very well indeed to heighten our awareness of the doorways and thresholds, the liminal timespaces of our lives: our hearts, our minds, our homes, our purses. Perhaps a mezuzah of our own. Maybe not mounted on our doorpost, but in the form of a renewed practice of daily prayer. Before dashing into the day's activities might we wait with God for a moment, touch base by saying "God show me the way, God give me the strength?" Or when we're done for the day, and ready to retire, might we be sure, during Advent, to pause for ten seconds' silence while reorienting ourselves with thoughts of gratitude and purpose?

As for lighting up the street, yes indeed Christmas decorations count. But remember, the Menorah has only nine lights, not ten thousand, so moderation is a good way to go. And of course there are other ways to light up the world and spread the good news of God's love: Let them see your good works. "Be the change you want to see," "Don't just talk the talk, walk the walk." Advent is a time of intentional, heightened observation of ourselves: our motivations and accomplishments, our failings, large or small, and also the dreams and plans we're making to change things, to change ourselves.

We hear about, wonder about and talk about being born again as Christians. Now, keeping in mind the shopkeeper's wisecrack, "In God we trust, all others pay cash," we do well to acknowledge that declaring oneself 'born again' does not guarantee just, ethical, virtuous behavior. Nor does it entitle anybody to special rights, privileges or liberties. But through the sacrament of our baptism, through the experience of spiritually awakening to the power of love, and through the story of Jesus, we can relate to and revel in a sense of transformative newness, of rebirth.

Here in Advent, our mother is pregnant with us and nearing her due date. Shortly after the darkest night, we fully expect to be born again. Only this time we get to observe, enjoy and marvel at the miracle of our own birth. Not only that, we get to choose again, as if for the first time, the atmosphere we will breathe within our homes and the character we will exercise out in the world.

### **Hymn 61 Sleepers awake! The voice astounds us!**

"Sleepers, wake!" A voice astounds us,  
The shout of rampart-guards surrounds us:  
"Awake, Jerusalem, arise!" Midnight's peace their cry has broken,  
Their urgent summons clearly spoken:  
"The time has come, O maidens wise!  
Rise up, and give us light; the Bridegroom is in sight. Alleluia!  
Your lamps prepare and hasten there,  
That you the wedding feast may share."

Zion hears the watchmen singing;  
Her heart with joyful hope is springing,  
She wakes and hurries through the night.  
Forth he comes, her Bridegroom glorious  
In strength of grace, in truth victorious:  
Her star is risen, her light grows bright.  
Now come, most worthy Lord, God's Son, Incarnate Word,  
Alleluia! We follow all and heed your call  
To come into the banquet hall.

Lamb of God, the heavens adore you;  
Let saints and angels sing before you,  
As harps and cymbals swell the sound.  
Twelve great pearls, the city's portals:  
Through them we stream to join th' immortals  
As we with joy your throne surround.  
No eye has known the sight, no ear heard such delight:  
Alleluia! Therefore, we sing to greet our King;  
Forever let our praises ring.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQM5ybyiC5c>

## Shades

Shall I tell you, then, how it is?  
There came a cloven gleam  
Like a tongue of darkened flame  
To flicker in me.

And so I seem  
To have you still the same  
In one world with me.

In the flicker of a flower,  
In a worm that is blind, yet strives,  
In a mouse that pauses to listen

Glimmers our  
Shadow; yet it deprives  
Them none of their glisten.

In every shaken morsel  
I see our shadow tremble  
As if it rippled from out of us hand in hand.

As if it were part and parcel,  
One shadow, and we need not dissemble  
Our darkness: do you understand?

For I have told you plainly how it is.

D. H. Lawrence