

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

Well, welcome to Advent! You were probably expecting early news of Christmas, but you walk smack into "...people fainting from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world." With everything around us all about Christmas coming down our throats, you thought you might hear strains of Little Drummer Boy. Instead you get "distress among nations and confusion by the roaring of the sea." And it will get worse! In the coming weeks, we will be called snakes, and vipers; and the "chaff that will be thrown into a raging fire in the last days." Hello! Welcome to Advent!

Actually, on the other hand, Advent will get better. Soon, the sanctuary will be decorated in greenery and wreathes and bows. In a matter of weeks, we will sing carols of Christmas, and we will hear about the birth of a special baby...but, of course, all babies are special...and we will hold candles high and sing "Silent Night."

But that is the way of Advent. It is a season of mixed messages; like a real-life "good news/bad news" joke, and if we only hear part of the message, we miss the point. If we only hear the good news; "peace on earth, the Savior is born!", we miss the wake up call that warns us of a day of judgment that will one day come. And if we only hear the bad news, we miss the comfort and security that will protect the People of God from that final day. So, let us take a few minutes to learn about Advent.

First, we are in a new liturgical year. The church year starts today, and we might notice the color blue. For all of the summer and most of the fall, we were green for the Season of Pentecost...and last week, it was white for Christ the King Sunday. But, today? We are using blue vestments. As opposed to the Season of Lent, which uses purple to underscore a season of penitence and contrition, Advent is the season of quiet reflection...and blue is a peaceful color, a color that invites us to ponder what we see and hear and experience.

The season inviting us to ponder what we will see, and hear, and experience.

That makes sense...because the word "Advent" literally means "coming". It is from the root word "adventure." Just around the corner. Something is about to happen. Soon...but not yet...we will experience a new thing. What will happen? When will it come? That is part of the adventure, and that is why we call it Advent.

But this theme of coming has three different references: a past, a present, and a future. Something came once, something is coming now, and something will come later.

Most of us celebrate the “something that came once”. We celebrate the One who came in a manger 2000 plus years ago. We decorate our homes, sing carols in church, ring bells and give gifts, and speak of joy...as God came to earth in the form of a child. Because we celebrate it every year, there is little that is adventurous about it. But imagine what it was like for the people of Israel, who waited for centuries for the coming of the Messiah. They watched for the signs of his coming, they anticipated what life would be like when he arrived, and the ones who recognized him at his birth rejoiced greatly. In their way, each Advent, we slowly approach Christmas, so that we can appreciate the anticipation of a Savior.

Still, Jesus also comes in the present. Not in a manger, or on a cross, but in countless other ways. Into the lives of children through the sacrament of baptism. He will be born in them, birthed in their hearts, every bit as realistically as when he was born in a manger. But also he comes to us in the sacrament of Holy Communion when we eat the bread and drink the wine. He says we ingest him and he therefore goes with us into the mountains and valleys of our daily lives. If we think we are alone in this world and the problems that we face, think again....Jesus goes with us always. He did not just come once.

Today’s gospel message focuses on the third aspect of a coming...the coming of Jesus in the future, on the last day. Scripture is sprinkled with references of when the world, as we know it, comes to an end, and there he will be, when we least expect him. Out of the blue. Some people read these verses and are filled with terror, while others are filled with expectation...and the difference lies in the fact that some will be prepared for his coming, while others will not. Advent tells us to get ready.

OK, get ready...but for when? When will this happen? Jesus said that neither the angels in heaven nor the Son of Man know when this will occur...but the purpose of this gospel story today is that we should always be ready...always be prepared for the final coming of Christ.

That is the message of Advent...there is no time clock to tell us when the last day is coming. Being prepared is the ultimate goal. Knowing that when the time comes, our faith is in Jesus and Jesus only, and that alone saves us. Salvation is not to be found in our good works, not to be found in our financial security, not to be found in the hours we taught Sunday School or ushered or folded bulletins. When the time is up, when the game is over, the right team will be those who trust Jesus Christ as Savior. It is written, not to scare us, but to prepare us for his coming.

So, as we enter this Advent season, perhaps it is a good time to contemplate the personal nature and status of our faith....and we can thank God that our eternity is determined, and we are ready for his coming.

Let the season of Adventure begin, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.