

**First Sunday of Advent**  
**Grace Episcopal Church of West Feliciana Parish**  
**St. Francisville, LA**  
**12/2/18**

**Luke 21:25-36**

Happy New Year! Today we begin a new liturgical year in our church. The season of advent lasts four Sundays, beginning today and ending on the Sunday right before Christmas Week, the time we celebrate the birth of the Christ child. The season invites us to solemn waiting, to prayer and meditation, to careful assessment of our lives, and to getting ready for the coming of our Savior. This “coming” has three different manifestations for us Christians: first during advent we get ready to commemorate, to remember, and to celebrate the first coming of our Savior in first century Palestine, two thousand years ago. It is to this first coming that Advent weeks 2, 3 and 4 point. We will hear the story once again of how God broke into our human world and took on flesh, so that those who accept him might be redeemed by his blood.

A second manifestation of the word “coming” has to do with the future, not-yet, return of Christ at the end of the days. It is to this future return that the Scriptural readings of today point us. Christ will come again and when he does, his Kingdom will be a full reality; heaven and earth will be one; humanity will be fully restored; and Christ will reign over the whole world. We are very familiar with these apocalyptic announcements. The Gospels tell us about birth pains and visible signs that we will be able to recognize when this return of Christ is imminent. Much of our Christian teaching throughout history has filled our imaginations with terror and anxiety about this end of times. Let me tell you a story about this. When I was about 7 or 8, I remember a Roman Catholic Sister teaching us about the need to be ready, to make weekly confession, and to repent daily for any sins that we might have committed during the day. On this occasion, sister Maria looked at us intently and then said, “The great torments of hell await those who are not ready when our Lord returns”. She then called for a volunteer to come to the front, asked him to extend his hand towards her, and proceeded to light a match and hold it under his hand. She was not quite touching the boy’s hand, but she was close enough to cause pain. She firmly held the young boy’s hand in place as the match burned, even though the young boy began to cry almost immediately. She then looked at us and said, “Imagine the pain of millions of matches burning your body day and night for eternity and eternity.”

It is easy to think of Advent as the remembrance of a past event, or the announcement of a future event to come at the end of days. But, Advent also points to

another type of “coming” and that is a present coming. Advent reminds us that Christ is with us and that he longs to come into our lives. Advent invites us to be re-born in the present, to open ourselves to a deeper spiritual relationship with Christ, to be born to new spiritual life in him who is the source of life, the source of salvation, and the source of all Spiritual freedom. When we sing, “O come, O come Emmanuel,” we are not just speaking of a future coming at the end of days. We are also saying, “Come now, and rescue us from the slavery of our sins and addictions; come now and free us from our obsessions, our regrets, our hurts, our anger, our thirst for power at the expense of all else, our desire for revenge and vindication, our intense emotions against others. We say, come now, and start in us the work you came to earth to do. Come because we are captive Israel”.

Advent invites us to prepare for the coming of Christ as commemoration of a past event, as a present reality, and as a future event. It suggests that we do so in several ways: by repentance, by prayer, and by patient waiting. Let me use a very appropriate metaphor to illustrate these three ways of getting ready. When a couple are expecting a baby they go through great extents to make sure that they are ready for the baby. They set-up the nursery, often clearing a room of clutter, fixing it, filling it with appropriate furniture to make sure that baby will be happy and comfortable in his new room. Well, when we wait for the coming of Christ we too need to make space for him. We need to assess where we are and to identify what clutters our life. We need to reflect, to repent, and to empty our life of what’s not important, so that Christ can fill it with what truly matters: His Holy Spirit in our lives.

An expectant mother prays for the safe arrival of the baby, and for her health and the health of the baby. This praying is as important in preparing for the arrival of the baby as a proper diet and proper sleep. We likewise, prepare for the arrival of Christ through prayer. We pray that his kingdom may become a reality. We pray that he may come again soon, because we know that for those who believe in him, his return is a joyous event for which we must await “standing up” and with “our heads raised up” for the one who is to come is a friend and not a merciless judge.

Lastly, an expectant mother must be patient in her waiting for the baby to arrive. She can not anticipate the day or the hour, but she knows that her baby will arrive soon to fill her life with happiness and joy. We too must be patient as we wait for Christ. We do not know the day or the hour of his arrival, but we know that he will come and that there is a glorious future awaiting for those who endure to the end.

But, my friends, repentance, prayer, and patient waiting are very difficult to practice during Advent. We are all confronted with so many distractions during this

season, that it is virtually impossible to prepare for Christ's coming. Year after year, Wall Street highjacks the season of Advent to sell us more and more toys. This is the season of unbridled consumerism, a time well-known for its "Black Friday", half-price sales, long lines, impossible to get parking spaces, and high levels of stress. This is the season when we all become like children, either living precariously through our own children, or finally getting those things we always wanted but never got when we were young. This is the season where excess is encouraged and even patriotic. After all, we are told that our very economy relies heavily on our spending habits. The giving and receiving of material gifts becomes the driving focus of Christmas, and we almost lose sight of Advent; we almost forget to take a pause and to think about the direction of our lives; we forget to make room for Christ.

As we begin another Christian year, let me invite us all to make a deeper, renewed commitment to Christ and to his church this year, and to make a concerted effort to prepare for Christmas this year by creating space in your heart for Christ. He longs to come into our lives even now in the here and now of our existence. He longs for us to make room for him and to welcome him into our lives and into our hearts this Christmas. This child we long for is God's gift to all of us, and the best news is that we don't have to step over anyone at Walmart to get to him, we don't have to cut in line, we don't have to elbow our way through the mobs, we don't have to drive all over the city looking for him, we don't have to re-mortgage our homes to buy him, and we don't even have to that good to get him. This gift from the Father is a free gift. All that it requires is that we make room for him. The gift is ours for the taking if we are willing to accept him.

I pray today that we will use this Advent as the time when we do some Winter cleaning in our lives, getting rid of any clutter that might block Christ from taking residence in our lives. I pray that we take a pause, breathe, pray, tell each other the great stories of our salvation, and get ready to welcome the Savior of the World into our your life. I pray that he will take flesh in our hearts and transform our lives in amazing and radical ways. Amen!