

December 1, 2021

Preparation and Waiting: Celebrating the Promise of ADVENT

Introduction: *Jesus entered our world as a baby with minimal fanfare, with mountains of hope placed on His shoulders. For centuries, the people of God clung to His promise of a Deliver, and at just the right time, Jesus arrived. We also find ourselves waiting on Jesus, eagerly anticipating His promised return. In this Advent study, I pray you will find encouragement for the wait in your life and trust God's promises and plan for you. As we prayerfully make this Advent journey together, I pray that we remember and celebrate God's kindness and trust God's faithfulness, even when the future seems uncertain. Yes, our HOPE has come, and at just the right time, Jesus will be back. Will "you" be ready?*

This week (Nov 28-Dec 4) we light the first purple candle for Preparation.

Read: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Luke 21:25-36



It's Advent again! It is that season where we are oriented—in everyday life as well as liturgically—toward Christmas. And yet, there are some stops we must make along the way. In today's readings we look forward to Jesus' triumphant return. Today, we look to the apocalypse. The prophecy from Jeremiah signals the coming of the fulfillment of God's promise when all shall live in peace and justice. This era of justice and flourishing for all people, we can all probably agree, has not yet come to pass. The coming Messiah was meant to usher in this age of peace on earth, end to war, and an end to the woes of humanity. And yet, in our gospel reading from Luke, Jesus says that time has not yet come. Instead, he is declaring prophecies of distress, roaring of waves, fear, and foreboding. This time of distress of the Son of Man's return is not far away in the future, according to Jesus, who teaches, "Truly I tell you; this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place."

To wait with faith is to acknowledge that the waiting is not pointless. It is to believe that the waiting will be worth it. In addition to cognitive belief, waiting is a time for feeling. We see in Paul's letter that he himself is waiting to see this community again. But his faith influences the way that he waits to be reunited. While apart, he reaches for that feeling of joy found in each other's presence: "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." Here, Paul is naming the joy of Christian connection, but he is also naming the fact that he misses this community of his friends.

Waiting is a time to look around and recognize that all is not as it should be or could be. Waiting is the time to lean into these feelings of longing. It is a time to lean into those feelings that not all is right, and that there is something better to come. It is a time to dream; it is a time to imagine. When we wait, though it seems that death and suffering run rampant and unrestrained through our world, we dream of being comforted. We dream of being reunited with loved ones. We dream of a time when God is going to make everything alright. To echo the words of Jeremiah, we dream of a time when God's promise is fulfilled, and all will live in safety and in flourishing. We dream of a day when God will execute justice and righteousness throughout the land.

In the coming weeks of Advent, we will hear of the prophets who came to prepare the way for Jesus. And of course, we will hear of Mary and Elizabeth. The task before us is to read and hear these stories in the spirit of Advent as we prepare and wait.

Advent is a time to pause and maybe even to stop. It is a time to dig deeper into personal reflections. It is a time to linger with questions rather than rush to answers. These moments of delay or disruption create space to feel. In these coming weeks leading up to Christmas, may we all pause and look around. May we notice those things

which are and those things we wish would be. Certainly, we believe in Christmas and the theologies of Incarnation and of God's presence with us. But we also believe in the not-yet. We believe in Christmas but let us also believe in Advent, the preparation and the waiting for the future coming of Christ.

What does it mean to believe in Advent? To believe in Advent is to believe in waiting. And may our waiting be full of dreams for a better world, full of God's justice and love made present to all. Amen. (*Excerpt from Waiting by Michael Toy.*)

1. Compared to even a few years ago, what is your relationship with waiting? Are you more patient? Less patient? Why?

2. When you find yourself becoming impatient this week – with a friend or family member, with a colleague, with God – slowly repeat this prayer: “Come, Lord Jesus.”

3. What do you need to lay at the Lord's feet today?

Reflection: *Spend some time in quiet reflection, letting your thoughts dwell on the light of Christ and His impact on our sin-darkened world.*

