

1 Advent Year A  
December 1, 2019  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
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Isaiah 2:1-5   Psalm 122   Romans 13:11-14   Matthew 24:36-44

A twelfth century abbot named Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that there are three Advents; it is into this three-fold time that we enter today.

The word Advent means coming; Advent number 1 is Jesus' Incarnation, the historical time that God came into the world, human and divine in the person of Jesus.

The second Advent is this one, the time each year before Christmas. In this middle Advent, where will we find Jesus today, tomorrow ... in everyday life? Jesus comes to us again and again, in "the still small voice," the stranger, the hungry and the poor, in ourselves and others.

The third Advent is the end of the age, when Jesus comes again. We are waiting, still. First century apostles, then disciples waited weeks, then years, decades ... and now, millenia later, we wait.

We are called in our faith journey to take part, to *practice*, these advents. How do we do that?

Paul tells us to wake up and put on the armor of light, putting aside the darkness. Darkness includes not only events and situations in the world at large, but also those practices that keep us away from God. Advent is a time of waiting and reflection, of preparing to know Jesus again. So at a time of year when darkness descends earlier each day, we light a candle, at first a single flame, and banish the darkness. Week by week, in worship, the light expands until we welcome the Christ child in our worship, our lives, our hearts.

Here is the challenge of Advent, to light a candle and wait for true light, to "put on" the way of love in the face of a world that is screaming: buy it all – have it all – do it all – now! We feel so far behind... the baking, the shopping, in all the "stuff" and we are not behind. We are waiting. In the coming weeks, friends, practice waiting. Indulge in a bit of time to light the candle, then candles in your Advent wreath. Breathe deeply and pray, "come, Lord Jesus." You are right on track in waiting for Immanuel. Week by week, practice adding the light.

Why have an Advent practice at all? The Incarnation is much more than a moment of birth in a stable. The Incarnation is God's breaking into the world in the person of Jesus in order to reconcile all of creation to God's self. God came into the

world, not to create “the birth of Jesus,” but to save the world. God leads us toward *shalom*, deep peace and unity, in a world leaning toward darkness. Do not deny yourselves the opportunity to ponder the three Advents, to live in Advent in some way. There are books with daily meditations for the season, emails to which you can subscribe. Advent is a great time to commit or recommit yourself to praying the daily office – morning prayer or evening prayer. I am recommitting myself to reading morning prayer every day, to taking additional essential time with God, especially on the days that I think I have no time to be quiet, reflective, prayerful. Think, friends – no time to listen to and for God? We are Christians, Christ – followers, *every day*; how do we choose to live *that* life, *this* life?

If your Christmas tree is already up, sit in that light, enjoy its beauty each day (until January 6<sup>th</sup>!). Add a purple or blue ornament to remember your practice of Advent. :) Being a person of faith – any faith – is not easy. Living into one’s faith, however, is what we have promised – covenanted – to do, in our baptism, our confirmation/reception into the church. We are practicing our faith each week when we come here. Many people tell me that they have trouble carrying prayer and worship into the days beyond Sunday. Advent is a great time to give it another try. Say the Lord’s Prayer when you wake up, or just before falling asleep. It is folly to wait for the world to show us a Christian life; we are the ones who bring Christianity to life. Will you join me in a commitment to prayer this month? Let me know how it’s going; share your struggles with one another, share your joys and revelations from this set-aside time.

In this single light of Advent, here is a short meditation for today:

How long, brothers and sisters,

Does it take us to receive the perfect gift of knowing Jesus?

Jesus is our perfect gift. Jesus is the armor in which we wrap ourselves. Jesus is the light that transforms our world.

Today we light a single candle,

And already we are transformed by its light.

This single candle is the light of a new day and of a new year.

This single candle has taken away the darkness.

We who are brothers and sisters – relatives – say to one another every week:  
“peace be with you.”

It is we who need light and peace and expectation, anticipation, and hope!

This Advent, beginning today, light a candle. Spend some time in its light.

Pray for peace - say it out loud: peace be with you. Peace be in the world. Peace be within **me**, God. Teach me to wait, to find you, and to know you this Advent.

Peace.