

Advent 1A 2019 SSP

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; St. Matthew 24:36-44

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Today we begin a new Church Year with Advent Sunday. The word, Advent, is derived from the Latin, *Ad-venire*, which means to “come to or towards,” and in our case it means that our Lord Jesus Christ is coming to or towards us.

If we fast forward to the fourth or last Sunday of Advent, the Sunday before Christmas, and we work backwards to where we are now, we see the comings of Jesus Christ in historical order. There is first the coming of Jesus in his Incarnation – his Annunciation, Conception, and Birth as the Word-made-flesh born of the Virgin Mary. Then there is the coming of Christ in his public ministry, heralded by the prophet John the Baptist. Finally, there is Christ’s coming in glorious majesty to judge the world at the end of time, described as the event of all events for us all to be alert and to watch for.

By the way, this evening here at 5:30, I encourage you to return for the beautiful service of Advent Lessons and Carols, especially for the powerful music performed by Maestro Busby and the Choir. This service gives an overview, as just outlined, of the themes of the entire Advent Season.

As I sketch the meaning of the word Advent, and outline the great Advent themes from Christ’s Virginal Conception and Birth to his public ministry to his return in glorious majesty, I feel the need to add something, something implicit in the narratives of both Mary and John the Baptist. That is the singular personal dimension of Jesus’s Advent.

Let’s begin briefly with Mary and with John the Baptist. They were both real people. When Mary was greeted by the angel with the word that she was highly favored and was going

to be the Mother of God's Son, she was troubled. She was betrothed. She was a virgin and would remain so. How could this be? The Holy Spirit would overshadow her; God's power would come upon her. The risks of public shame and rejection by Joseph notwithstanding, she said Yes and embraced the Advent of her Son and Savior: Let it be. Mary's and Joseph's are great stories of faith and courage.

John the Baptist, having baptized and heralded Jesus, began to worry and doubt. Herod had imprisoned John and would execute him. Had John bet everything on nothing? Where were the great acts of the Messiah? His answer from Jesus overturned the Messianic assumptions of power and politics: instead, the blind received sight, the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, the poor had good news – this was a message from the Lamb of God whose sacrificial life and love would overcome the sins of the world.

But maybe you find it a little hard to identify with the Virgin Mary or John the Baptist. Then how about a sinner and intellectual who frequented lecture halls and had a complicated domestic life? This would be in this case the African Augustine of Hippo, an urbane well-born man living near the end of the Roman Empire, whose blessings he enjoyed. He found himself at sea in the spirit. Was there a God or not? What meaning was there to life? These sorts of world-weary questions weighed on him. One day he had a strange feeling as he overheard children playing and one of them kept repeating, "Tolle lege, tolle lege." "Take and read, take and read." As it happened he looked at Scripture (his mother was a devout Christian) and came upon this from Paul's Letter to the Romans. It was our Epistle reading for today:

"The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us 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 or jealousy. Instead put on the Lord Jesus

Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” So in process of time, he did. It was quite a personal Advent Christ made to Augustine. He became the father of western Christianity. A millennium later, both Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther looked to him.

My own life was upended by Christ’s Advent. As a boy I had been very moved and troubled by the crucifixion of Jesus. Fast forward to studying in college the night before a quiz which happened to be on Christ’s prediction of his death. Let’s just say Jesus really introduced himself to me that night, and the introduction included the fact that he lives and reigns as Lord from his cross. I haven’t changed the world like Augustine, but I wouldn’t be here today otherwise.

And I suspect you wouldn’t be here otherwise, either, had not Jesus in one way or another made his Advent to you. I have listened to enough of you in the past six months to know that here is a treasury of grace and of experiences of Christ in this little flock of his. Some of your stories have knocked me back on my heels – and it is one of the privileges of the ministry to see how Christ works his way, makes his Advent, to his people in his church.

So what are we bidden to do? To stay awake. To watch. To hold fast to Christ’s Advent, to what we already have received. We know not the day nor the hour. I don’t know when The End will come. But I certainly know that my own End will come, and that I will meet Jesus as both my Savior and Judge. How do I want him to find me? In what condition?

We can, in this Mass, prepare by making a devout Holy Communion. If the Eucharist, in that precious Host and Cup, isn’t an Advent, then I don’t know what is. So I say Amen, come Lord Jesus.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.