

## Advent 2021 Part 2

### What's It All About, Advent? Part 2

Last Sunday I shared with you some of the purpose for Advent in the life of the church and reasons I feel it is important we participate in this season, preparing our hearts for the Advent, the arrival of God's son, born of a virgin. We also use this time preparing our hearts for his next arrival when he comes as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Just to quickly review, last week I quoted from Dr. Chris Green who said **“Advent is a season of waiting on God in ways that open us more and more completely to the fullness of God, a time to learn to wait as God waits.”...Chris Green.** We talked about Advent standing in opposition to the misplaced values of our culture. We said only the hungry can celebrate Advent. I quoted Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that **“Advent can be celebrated only by those whose souls give them no peace, who know that they are poor and incomplete and who sense something of the greatness that is supposed to come, before which they can only bow in humble timidity, waiting until he inclines himself toward us, the Holy One himself, God in the child in the manger. God is coming; the Lord Jesus is coming; Christmas is coming.”...Dietrich Bonhoeffer.**

We said Advent gives us time to clear our vision. With eyes of faith we view the promises once again, seeing everything in light of Christ. Finally, we said Advent points us to fulfillment. We live in anticipation of a time when God's promises will be fulfilled. We will talk more about this in a moment, but His promise that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son and he would save his people from their sins, those promises were fulfilled as the promised Messiah was born in Bethlehem. His promise that this same Jesus will come again and take us to be with him and make all things new, that promise will be fulfilled as well. We live in anticipation of his Advent, his arrival, his coming, his fulfillment of every promise.

Let me start by reminding you again that **Advent is about anticipation.** In one sense during Advent we place ourselves on the other side of the promise. We're waiting, anticipating, because Jesus hasn't been born yet. Heaven's preparations aren't yet complete. It's not the fullness of time, not just yet. During these four Sundays, Mary and Joseph are packing, preparing for the journey, leaving Nazareth and making their way south to Bethlehem. The roads are crowded with folks heading to the “city of David” because of Caesar Augustus and his demand for taxes. Mary and Joseph move slower than most of the travelers because of her

condition. Imagine traveling by donkey or by foot in your nine month of pregnancy? We journey with Mary and Joseph, day by day, step by step.

Advent is about anticipation. Is it time? Not yet, but almost. Something extraordinary is about to happen. It has been a long time, 400 years, since the last prophet has spoken in Israel, but God's silence is about to be broken by the cries of a newborn baby. Anticipation. Can you feel it? Can you sense it? God the Savior is about to be born, Christ the Lord, and this will be the sign to us – a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. This is what Advent is all about. God is coming, clothed in flesh, Immanuel, God with us, the God in the manger!

What are you anticipating? What is ahead for you? When was the last time God spoke clearly to you? Mary knew what God had said, but she was still having to wait, anticipating. What has God promised that you have not seen or realized as of yet? Have you given up on Him? Have you forgotten the promises? Have you stopped anticipating, expecting? Tired of waiting? Perhaps it's time to reawaken that sense of anticipation. Stir up your faith!

**Advent teaches us to long again, longing for what has not yet been fulfilled.** In Advent we long for Christ to come, to be born, but of course we know he has already come and if we have received him as Savior and Lord, then we know he has been born in us. Think of this: We have said yes as Mary did and we too have become a dwelling place for Christ. He lives in us. But in Advent we long for what we have and for what we do not yet have. We long for Christ, whom we have, but also for more of Him, more of his presence and fullness, more of his wisdom and love and mercy and light. Remember what Chris Green said, "Advent is a season of waiting on God in ways that open us more and more completely to the fullness of God..." Jesus lives in my heart, but I long for more and more of Him. Thank God for what I have and who I am in Christ, but I long for what has not yet been formed and fulfilled in my life. Do you understand? Jesus the light of the world has come, but I admit there are still places of darkness and shadow in my heart, in my life, places where I've been reluctant to let his light shine. Perhaps it's the same for you. We say he is Savior and Lord, and yet there are aspects of my life where I'm pretty much lord of my life and I leave Jesus out of it. Advent gives me time to pray "Lord, increase my longing for what has not yet been fulfilled. Increase my longing for the light of the world to shine into the shadowlands of my heart and mind. Increase my longing for Jesus to be Lord of every moment, every decision, every aspect, every action of my life." O Come O Come Emmanuel and fulfill every longing of our heart.

**Advent is about hope.** In Advent we believe and hope that the way things are today, that's not the way things will be tomorrow! Emmanuel is coming and everything changes. The prophet Isaiah declared, **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” Isaiah 9:2.** You know what it's like to walk in darkness. Everything is uncertain. You lack the confidence to take a bold step because you can't see what is ahead. Monsters lurk in the shadows, at least that's how it looks to you when you are walking in darkness. Everything is frightening, sinister, unknown. But Advent is about hoping in the dark. It is the promise of light invading our darkness. Things are about to change. Notice the prophetic past tense of this verse. Isaiah said it like it had already happened. “The people walking in darkness HAVE SEEN a great light...” He spoke of it in the past tense even though it would not happen for hundreds of years because it was just that certain. God had promised. God had spoken and Isaiah wrote it down, certain it would happen because God is faithful. The prophet was filled with hope. It will come to pass.

In the verses just before this, in Isaiah 8, the prophet describes people who reject the word of God and turn to mediums and spiritists rather than turning to God. He says when that doesn't help they will curse their king and curse their God. **“Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.” Isaiah 8:22** This is the condition we find ourselves in without a Savior, without hope. This is the condition of the world without God, having rejected him, hungry, hopeless, starving, angry, wandering in utter darkness. Frightened, uncertain because we can't see in the dark. But in the very next verse the prophet says, **“Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.” Isaiah 9:1** Wait. What just happened? I thought it was only distress and darkness and fearful gloom. Pandemic and bad politicians and bad policies. What changed? How did we get from utter darkness to “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light”? The prophet tells us in verse 6. **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.” Isaiah 9:6-7**

Hope in the darkness! A child is born, a Son is given. He has come to save us, to shine his light of grace and mercy on us, to deliver us from a kingdom of darkness and death and bring us to his kingdom of light and life. You don't have to live in darkness and gloom any longer. Jesus has come to save us from our sins, from ourselves, from sinful choices and a sinful nature. He has come to save us from hell and eternal separation from God. He has come to make us his own, to make us new. A child is born, a Son is given and now there is hope.

Isaiah spoke of the light shining in the darkness. John calls him the true light and says of Jesus, **“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world...He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...” John 1:9-12** If you've been walking and living in darkness, the true light has come into the world. He came to save you, to deliver you so you don't have to live in darkness and gloom any longer. What should you do? Receive him, believe in his name. Believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the gift of God who has come to take away your sins. Believe he died on the cross for you and bore the penalty for your sins and then rose again, conquering death and the grave. Believe he will save you and give you new life if you repent of your sins and turn to him today. He will make you his very own! That is the hope of Advent. That's the good news.

But there is more. What is it we are hoping for now? In that first Advent John says, **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14** God with us, the Word in flesh and we have seen his glory John says. But John will write again. In Revelation as he speaks of his vision John declares, **“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Revelation 21:1-5**

Do you see the parallels? Advent. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling with us. God in the manger and to all who believed he made them his own, children of God. But think of the second Advent. He will come again and make his dwelling with us. To all who believe we will be his people, his children and he will be our God. He will wipe every tear from our eyes. No more death, no more mourning, grieving, crying or pain. All things will be made new. He will rule and reign forever. Of his government and of its increase there will be no end. This is what we hope for. This is what we sing about. Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Joy to the world, the Lord is coming. Let us prepare our hearts to receive our king! Advent is hope and promise and fulfillment!

**Advent is preparation for his coming.** He will come again and everything I just read will happen. These words are “trustworthy and true” said the One seated on the throne. He will come and He will make everything new. The old fallen, distorted, damaged order of things will pass away. How we long for his coming.

But in the meantime, think of this: Christ comes to us in a multitude of ways, multiple comings, every day he comes to us, by His Holy Spirit, through his body the church, through the working of his grace. I began by talking about unfulfilled longing. What has God promised that hasn't been fulfilled as of yet? Perhaps today is the day Christ is coming to fulfill that word to you. Have you prepared for the arrival of that promise? Have you prepared for the answer to that prayer of longing? Are you preparing for his arrival in your circumstances, in your decision making process, in your relationships, in your marriage, your family situation, in your health crisis, in your present, your future? He is coming to you, today, in your circumstances.

I want us to pray. Do you need Jesus to come into some situation in your life, in your family? Do you need him to come satisfy that unfulfilled longing in your heart? Prepare your heart for his coming! Tell him, “Lord, I'm preparing, believing for the longing of my heart to be satisfied and fulfilled. Believing for the longed for answer to my prayers. Believing for Jesus to come and change my circumstances. I'm believing, expecting and I won't stop expecting until he comes. O Come O Come Emmanuel, come now into my life, my situation!”