

Advent 1
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Today is the beginning
of our new year.
The first Sunday in Advent,
The time of hope and
expectation of
eschatological things,

It's a strange way
to begin a new year, really,
A strange way to begin
the expectation
of a baby's birth.
The expectation
Of a king's return.

The Rev. Ken Collins,
whose work I read
in preparation
for the advent season,
says that Advent
“plunges us immediately
into the tension
between the “already”
of Christ having come
in the flesh
and the “not yet”
of the consummation
of all things in Christ
at the end of time.”

We color our tension
In shades of purple and blue.

Advent is not a joyous time,
like the season of Christmas
which we prepare for,
but it is a time of looking
not only for the coming
of Christ in the manger
but the coming of Christ
into our world again.

That is what our
 season is named for, after all,
advent means
 "coming" or "arrival."

Collins says that
 "In this double focus
 on past and future,
 Advent also symbolizes
 the spiritual journey
 of individuals
 and a congregation,
 as they affirm that
 Christ has come,
 that He is present
 in the world today,
 and that He will come
 again in power.

That acknowledgment provides
 a basis for Kingdom ethics,
 for holy living arising
 from a profound sense
 that we live "between the times"
 and are called to be
 faithful stewards
 of what is entrusted to us
 as God's people.
 So, as the church celebrates
 God's in breaking into history
 in the Incarnation,
 and anticipates
 a future consummation
 to that history
 for which "all creation
 is groaning awaiting
 its redemption,"

it also confesses its own
 responsibility as a people
 commissioned to "love
 the Lord your God
 with all your heart"
 and to "love your neighbor as yourself."

In advent we experience

a yearning for peace,
for a repeal of the evil
in our broken world,
for a redeemer to come
and release us from oppression.

We see that hope
in our lessons today.
Isaiah cries for a time
when peace reigns,
when the lion shall sleep
with the lamb and plows
will be made from
weapons no longer needed.

This hope also anticipates
a time when the world
will held accountable
for sin and
our gospel speaks
to that time as well.

Of course,
part of the expectation
also anticipates
a judgment on sin
and a calling of the world
to accountability before God.

It's not a personal
accountability, however.
Advent Is not the time
When we consider
our personal shortfalls or sins
It is a time when we consider
the errors of the whole
people of God.

In the face of
human brokenness,
oppression and Injustice
we long for the systemic evil
of our world to be vindicated
by our God who Is
our strength and our redeemer.

For this very reason,
Advent is a time
of expectation and alertness
marked specifically
by prayer.

We pray that we
are ready.
We pray that
Christ will come.
We pray that peace
Will reign in the world at last.

For centuries the faithful
have used Advent calendars
and wreaths to mark
this time of waiting
and to regulate
their prayers.

Advent calendars
mark the 25 days
before Christmas,
usually with a scripture verse
or treat behind
a numbered paper door.

A selection of printable
or interactive Advent
calendars will be available
On the resource section
Of our website
After 3:00 today.

Advent wreaths,
which were first used
in homes and only then
found a place
in the church sanctuary,
help to mark the weeks
leading from the first
week of Advent
until the day
of Christ's birth.

Some believe

the tradition of the wreath
was taken from the
scandinavian pagans
who watched
the northern lights
lengthen in the sky
until there
was no room for daylight.

They brought
in wagon wheels
draped with greenery
and used candles as a sign
of their longing
for the sun's return.

Later, the people
were baptized
and converted,
and these longings
turned to a desire
for the Son of God's return
in the darkness of their lives.

(We have an advent wreath
lit this Sunday
and will have until
Christmas day.)

I encourage you
to consider bringing
the tradition of
the advent wreath
home with you today.

A handout is on
the narthex table
that tells you how to
create an advent wreath,
what prayers might be useful
for each wreath
and what the colors mean.

But in general,
most wreaths have
four candles,

all purple
or three purple
and one rose.

Occasionally folks will put
a white candle in the center,
the Christ candle,
which is lit on Christmas day.

During the first week
of Advent,
you light one candle.

Many will do this
every night at dinner,
or every morning
to begin the day
with prayer.

You can say a short prayer
or scripture verse as you
light the candles on Sunday
or you can simply light
the candle to mark
your devotion and time
of waiting each day.

The second week of Advent
you would light two candles.

The third week
you would light three,
including the rose colored candles
and the last week
you would light all four.

The candles may be
contained in a circle
or wreath which represents
the eternity of God's
love and mercy
or the candles
may stand alone
in a row
or cluster of candle sticks.

The candles are either
purple or blue
to match the liturgical color
that adorns the church.
The third candle
is rose colored
to mark the theme of joy.

Each week has a theme.
This first week our theme
is hope, which comes
straight from our
lectionary texts.
The second week
is love,
the third is joy
and the fourth is peace.

Christ is born
after this, the fulfillment
of our hopes and the
joyous season of Christmas
and kept promises
begins again.

The light of the candles
themselves
is also symbolic.
It reminds us that Jesus
is the light of the world,
the light that shines
in the darkest corners
of our lives.

It reminds us also that
we are called to be
the light of Christ to others.

The progression
of the candle lighting
symbolizes our waiting.
for the mystery
of the incarnation,
Emmanuel,
God with us
Then and now.

And that is why we hope.
Collins says
“I am convinced that
one of the main purposes
of the incarnation of Jesus
was to provide hope.

While most people today
want to talk about
the death of Jesus
and the Atonement of sins,
the early Church
celebrated the Resurrection
and the hope it embodied.

It was a proclamation
of a truth that rang
throughout the Old Testament,
that endings
are not always endings
but are opportunities
for God to bring new beginnings.

It is more about hope
that human existence
has meaning and possibility
beyond our present experiences,
a hope that the limits
of our lives
are not nearly as narrow
as we experience them to be.

It is not that *we* have possibility
in ourselves,
but that **God** is a God
of new things
and so all things are possible.”

Amen.