

December 2, 2007

The First Sunday in Advent

“Advent: a Season, a Past, a Present, a Future”

Romans 13:11-14

*Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

Sermon

If you look up advent in the American Heritage Dictionary, you get two definitions, one spelled with a Capital A and one spelled with a lowercase A. Naturally we go right to the Capital A understanding of Advent. After all, this season has to do with Jesus and you know how we always capitalize the words having to do with Jesus. My spell-checker is constantly highlighting the capitalized words “He” and “Son” and “Your” whenever I’m typing things to do with Jesus. The capital A Advent definition is this: “The liturgical period preceding Christmas, beginning in Western churches on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and in Eastern churches in mid-November, and observed by many Christians as a season of prayer, fasting and penitence.”

Well, duh. Of course that’s what Advent is. It’s the time leading up to Christmas! Thanksgiving is behind us and we look forward to December 25. It is a time for waiting and remembrance. But a waiting for and remembrance of what? That’s where people can go far off of the mark. For children who are way off the mark, it is a time of remembering how much loot there was under the tree last year and waiting to see if they’ll get more this year. For adults way off the mark, it is a time of remembering how low our credit card balance was in October and waiting for the January bill to hit. For many, these are unfortunate truths of the season in our time.

But we are baptized Christians and for us Advent means something different. The season is about Jesus. As the definition says, it can be “a season of prayer, fasting and penitence” a time of self reflection in light of the great gift of God that is Jesus Christ, His Son. Many Christians make the focus of Advent the remembrance of the Christmas event, a looking back to the entrance of the Christ child into the world. And that remembrance is also a waiting for the day we believers burst forth with song and celebration on Christmas Day, emulating that heavenly host that appeared to the shepherds outside Bethlehem who told the glad tidings of the divine birth and sang “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” On that day we mark the advent of Christ’s incarnation on earth.

But when I say, “the advent of Christ’s incarnation” I’m not using the big “A” advent. I’m using the small “a” advent definition, that is; “The coming or arrival, especially of something extremely important.” When we use the big “A” Advent, we’re talking about a season, and generally talking about a remembrance of the past and a waiting for the

celebration day that is the peak of the festivities. Our epistle lesson today is calling on us not to live only in the big “A” advent, but live more prominently in the small “a” advent.

It is extremely easy to become engrossed in the past at Advent. It’s a glorious past. It’s the story of the Savior of the world coming to earth through a miraculous virgin birth. It’s the story of John jumping in his mother’s womb for joy because Mary carries the Christ child in her own womb. It’s the story of God’s promise of salvation beginning to come to fruition through God’s Son becoming one with a fallen and dying humanity. But it is not an advent for we baptized and believing Christians. It is an arrival of the all important someone, but it already happened nearly 2000 years ago. This is not an advent in our present, it’s one in our past.

This Advent season, use the advent of Christ in the past not just as nostalgic look back at how gracious and loving God was to do this back in Bethlehem. Don’t remember just what happened 2000 years ago. Don’t be waiting just for the Christmas Day celebration.

Remember what He said. Wait for the day He spoke of. *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*

We don’t look to the past for our advent! We look to our present and our future! Christ did not just come to earth as a baby, live, die and then live again to ascend to heaven and leave us here on earth! The advent of Christ is not our history, it is our future! He is coming to take his children home. This is what Paul speaks of in Romans.

*“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand.”*

Paul speaks of a present reality, that of living in remembrance of God’s promises and Christ’s salvific work which are not relics of the past, but active in our very lives today. To be asleep is to be looking only at the past, maybe thinking it’s a nice story, but not allowing its ongoing reality pointing to the future to impact our lives. To be asleep is to be saying, “That was then, but this is now,” and be comfortable with your mortal life and the sin that goes along with it. Paul speaks of a present reality of waiting and expectation, looking forward to the fact that the Dude is coming back! The advent of Christ is around the corner and He’s coming for you! To be asleep is to refuse to face that truth because it might cramp your sinful style and take away some wicked fun.

Advent is a time for self examination, not only in light of what God did for you in the past, but of what he has done for you in the present and in light of what is right around the corner. My savior and yours is coming back for us and coming back soon. That’s a glorious thing! Christ is coming to give us paradise! How do we respond? *“So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”*

We are to do this, not because a powerful and formidable God and judge is coming to punish us for our wrongdoing, although that is certainly true for the unbeliever. We are to do this because our savior is returning for His people, and as His people we desire to do all within our power to be what He has made us. Paul describes what Christ has done to us in

Ephesians; *“at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”* We have been made children of the light, children of the day. And we look forward to that day when the light of the world returns to collect His children and bring them out of this world of darkness and sin and into our eternal home of purity and light.

This Advent season go ahead and do and experience all the big “A” Advent stuff. Remember the story. Feel it’s warmth and promise. Thank our God for His grace and mercy for sending His only Son to save this sin-darkened creation. But don’t leave it in the past. Examine yourself and your life, remembering who it is that God has made you. Rededicate yourself to living as Christ’s child of light, shunning the darkness of sin that is trying to ever cling to you. Make every day an advent of Christ in your life, returning to your Holy Baptism and having your sin washed away. Remember God’s promises for you and wait on them to come true in your future. You are a child of light. Look to the final and awesome advent on the horizon. Look to the dazzling light that is Christ exalted in all glory, the returning King of all creation, coming to collect His children of light to His bosom.