

## First Sunday of Advent A - A season for waiting; a season for keeping a hopeful heart.

December 1, 2019

**Advent** is the first season of the church year, beginning with the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continuing through the day before Christmas. The name is derived from a Latin word for "coming." **The season is a time of preparation and expectation for the coming celebration of our Lord's nativity, and for the final coming of Christ "in power and glory."**

Meteorologically, in Northern Hemisphere, winter starts on December 1, but we have already experienced minus double digits temperatures a few weeks ago. The forecast is likely a harsh cold and snowy winter! But there is one thing we can be sure of, the constant and predictable movement of the stars, the moon, and the sun which promises us there will be another day, another month, another year. In this season of late fall and early winter, the arc of the sun begins and ends further to the south and the days get shorter. But soon when the sun turns, we will know that once again spring will be coming even though it is at least another few moons away. On that day the constancy and faithfulness of the heavens will be proven to us once more. And so **this is the season for waiting; for keeping a watchful eye on the heavens; for keeping a hopeful heart.**

Now let us go back some hundred or so millennia. It is now about 1500 BC. In this Sunday's first reading, Isaiah (2:1-5) expressed the plan of the creator for all of us: "*many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths."*" It is this image that also moved the heart of the Psalmist (Psalm 122): "*I rejoiced because they said to me, "We will go up to the house of the LORD. And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together."*" In a world full of dangers and calamities, Isaiah and the Psalmist tried to imagine what the Lord had planned, and they pictured a safe walled city, compact and at unity with itself where all the people of the earth would stream and be at peace in the safety of one wall. This is Jerusalem. Not the Jerusalem that was, but the Jerusalem that is meant to be, the promised Jerusalem.

What about our own time? It is the year of our Lord Jesus Christ 2019. It is December 1st, the last month in the secular calendar. It is the very season when we all wait for the turning of the sun with anxious but hopeful hearts. And it is no coincidence that in the church's calendar this is the first month of the year. The church begins our year of worship with the reminder that we, too, wait anxiously for a constant and faithful light. And we, too, still wait for the peace of Isaiah's Jerusalem. The constancy of the heavenly bodies is still a thing of astonishing beauty. The ruins of ancient walled cities still fascinate us. But we have learned that neither the beauty and faithfulness of the sun and stars nor the strongest city walls can save us from the darkness of our own inconstant and sinful hearts. **We wait for a greater light. We wait for a Jerusalem not yet seen in this world.**

And to all of us, Jesus Christ speaks this Sunday (Matthew (24:36-44, note: Year A uses Gospel of Matthew). Jesus speaks from Mount Olives looking down on the streets of Jerusalem, thick with conflict and politics, which is both the image and the contradiction of the Jerusalem in Isaiah's vision and which is very much like the world we live in today. It is divided and dangerous. And his words are troubling. We want to know how it will all end. We want to know if, when, and how the new Jerusalem will come to be. We want him to tell us that we are safe, and that in the end, the world and our own individual lives are secured. But Jesus said, "*you must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.*" Jesus purposely refuses to tell us when. Only if we follow him in the rest of his life in Jerusalem and his return to Mount Olives will we understand why. We must stand near at his suffering and death. We must wait broken hearted at the tomb and we must take the time to let the joy of his risen life overtake our fear. We then will be set free from the demanding need for privileged knowledge that we are saved just because we take shelter in the walls of the right religion. We will know that the only real safety is in

giving up all demands for safety and in freely abandoning our hearts to the love of Jesus Christ. We will see that this Jesus Christ gains all power and safety by giving up all power and safety. His only safety is in his love of the Father and the Father's love for him. Only by such naked trust will Jesus finally triumph. Only when we give God access to our lives when we set aside the things of the world, casting off deeds of darkness, living in the light of the gospel will we be assured of the safety at the end.

In the next four weeks, we will be waiting for the celebration of Christmas, to celebrate Jesus Christ coming into our world and our lives in the form our own human flesh. **May we watchfully read the scriptures and pray often in the days ahead. May we abandon all our anxiety to take control of our lives and our history by our own wisdom and accomplishments. May we be awakened to the joy of finding the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and through him our love for one another. In those twin loves are our only heavenly light, our only safety, and our only peace.**