

First Sunday of Advent - November 28, 2021

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I hope you all had a happy and Blessed Thanksgiving. But now Thanksgiving is gone and ... as the old song says ... It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. It seems like everywhere you look there are signs and symbols of the season ... Christmas Carols on the radio ... yard and street decorations ... light strings on homes and in yards ... and ... of course ... the Advent Wreath. All the great old Christmas movies are again on TV ... "*A Christmas Carol*" ... "*It's a Wonderful Life*" ... "*Holiday Inn*" ... "*White Christmas*" ... and that modern day classic ... "*A Christmas Story*". And, of course, we are also bombarded with advertisements for all the things we absolutely **must** buy for Christmas. And it can be so easy to get lost in all the shopping for gifts ... the preparations for family get-togethers ... going to see the Plaza Lights and whatnot. It is easy to get sidetracked from the true purpose of the season ... to look beyond the fact that **Santa Claus** is coming to town ... and **prepare** our hearts and souls for **Jesus** coming to town.

In the Apocalyptic readings we've had recently ... we hear a lot about signs ... and interpreting signs. Today is no exception. Jesus tells us "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay. Well ... we see less of the sun and more of the moon these days and with covid there seems to be more than enough dismay to go around. And yet in today's reading we get a flavor of something else ... and **that** ... is hope ... promise ... new beginnings and preparation. Even Jeremiah ... that **gloomiest** of prophets ... tells us in our first reading: "The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will **fulfill** the promise ..." and Jesus ... in our Gospel reading promises ... in the midst of all his warnings ... that **ultimate** hope ... the reason we are all here ... "your redemption is at hand."

And it is in hope of the **promise** ... that we begin this new **liturgical** year ... and on this **first** day of the new church year ... let me be among the **first** to wish you a happy and blessed new year. In this new year we will set aside the Gospel of Mark for a while and hear most of our readings from the Gospel of Luke.

So today we begin our annual celebration of **Advent**. With the purple vestments it is easy to think Advent is a season of **penitential** waiting like Lent but there is a huge difference. Advent is a season of **joyful** waiting as we anticipate the celebration of the birth of Jesus ... with all of its signs and symbols of our **anticipation** and **preparation** for... His coming into the world as the incarnation God of love. We do this by preparing our souls ... through the Sacraments ... as fitting abodes for the coming of the Redeemer. And in a few minutes, we will witness ... once again in the Eucharist ... Christ's fulfillment of his promise to remain with us always.

But Advent is also a time to remind ourselves to prepare for the **final** coming of the Lord. In our second reading ... St. Paul tells us how we are to prepare ourselves. First and foremost, we must “increase and abound in **love** for one another and for **all** ... so as to strengthen our hearts” ... and **for all** means not just those who are easy to love ... but also for our **enemies!** And we must never forget all that love implies ... for instance ... seeing Christ in the poor ... and perhaps that hardest part of love ... **forgiveness** ... not just those who are **easy** to forgive but also those who are **hard** to forgive! All this we **must** do if we are to be “blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.” In the Gospel Jesus reminds us to keep on the alert at **all** times ... since we will not **know** ... **when** He will return again. May your Advent be a **true** time of preparation for ... the celebration of Jesus birth at Christmas and ... for His **return** ... at the end of time.