

Date: December 14, 2025 (Advent 3)

1. Texts: Isaiah 35:1-10; Canticle 19b; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11.
2. Subject: Advent.
3. Topic: patience in celebrating the return of the Lord.
4. Aim: encourage, educate.
5. Proposition: "God challenges us to celebrate Advent."

THE LORD'S RETURN, NOT HIS BIRTH

It is hard to celebrate Advent.

It's hard because most Christians don't know what Advent is about. It's hard because Christmas is looming with all its demands. It's hard because society only knows about Advent calendars containing chocolates, tea or beer. It's hard to celebrate Advent.

Let's be clear: Advent is the season *before* Christmas, but Advent is not preparation *for* Christmas.

Christmas always points towards the past. We celebrate that special birth from more than 2000 years ago. We use traditions that we have inherited from generations past, including some from the Middle Ages. We even sing words that we would never speak in public today. Christmas focusses only on the past.

Advent focusses on the future. In fact, the name "Advent" means "coming", as in the future that is coming. Christmas looks at the first coming of the Christ. Advent hopes for his second coming. Christmas is the past. Advent is the future.

So it is that Advent receives four weeks of celebration. Christmas gets only 12 days. So it is that Advent is the more important season. Christmas is the more sentimental season. Advent is more difficult to celebrate. Christmas may demand more work, but it is always easier to celebrate.

Nothing can be done about the emphasis and effort put into preparing for Christmas. We are all held prisoner by our traditions and the understandings of 2000 years ago. All we can do is try to stand firm against the tsunami of Christmas expectations and seek to carve out something for Advent.

Let's start with one very important observation: your world is going to end someday. Whether that occurs with your own death or whether it happens when the end of the world comes is irrelevant. The end is coming—and sooner for some of us than for others.

So we are all waiting for the second coming of the Christ. Advent is our annual reminder of this, and we're supposed to use these four weeks to prepare for that Second Coming.

Typically, part of our preparation is repentance. The colour purple is our reminder of this aspect of Advent.

Confession is the act of apology. Repentance is the change in our life's direction. We apologize to God for the evil we have thought or done. We apologize to people, having been assured that the apology won't cause more damage to the victims. That's confession, which is focussed on the past.

Repentance is the choice and decision to change our lives, reorienting ourselves according to God's plan for us. We confess and so acknowledge our responsibility. But we take a new course, away from sin, and that is our repentance. This shifts our focus to the future.

We prepare for the Second Coming by living a life of repentance.

Of parallel importance is our choice to remodel our lives according to the life of Christ. He is the pattern for living the divine life of God in our circumstances.

Perhaps we need to back up a little bit.

The Christ is part of the Godhead, the three-fold reality of God's existence. No one can really explain the divine physics of this. We just have to take it on faith. It's been revealed to us by God in Scripture and in the centuries of reflection by the Church. God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Or, if you prefer, as

Creator, Saviour and Guide. The Christ or the Messiah is the Son of God, the Saviour.

This God existed before there was any creation. And God existed as the threefold Trinity before there was any creation.

This God poured himself into time, space and human experience in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The Christ became incarnate in Jesus. Jesus is God living our life, bounded by time and physical realities.

So, in watching how Jesus lived, we get to see what living like God means. Jesus is our pattern, model and guide for living God's life in the here and now.

We prepare for the Second Coming by living the divine life in the here and now. That life is guided by love, trust, self-sacrifice and surrender to the will of God. That divine life is shared with others in our conversations and actions. God has aimed us in his direction, and we reach for that future using the life of the Christ as our model and guide.

Now you have a clearer sense of Advent and its relationship to Christmas. Now you have a clearer sense why clergy are avoiding Christmas carols up until Christmas Eve. If we allow Christmas to overwhelm Advent, we'll lose a significant season in our preparations for eternal life in the presence of God. If we focus on the joy of the birth, we'll lose touch with the repentance needed for salvation. If the traditions of the past take all the energy we have for preparation, then the future may catch us unaware and unprepared for its coming reality.

The warm sentiments of Christmas make it the easier and the shorter season for which we prepare. The history and traditions of the past are more easily accessible than the unknown future of Advent. The perhaps harsher realities of repentance and faithful living complicate our Advent celebrations. But, considering what the future may hold for all of us, which season requires a larger portion of our energy?

AMEN.