



The Light of the World.

We are fast approaching Advent and for the next 5 weeks I wish to concentrate on this wondrous time for all humanity.

Many just focus on Christmas day and preparing food and gifts and time with families – which are all great, however I want to help you understand the full meaning of Advent, why it is a powerful tradition for us and how we can incorporate it in our Christmas celebrations this year.

What is Advent?

Advent is the Latin word used for the Greek word *Parousia*. In the New Testament this word is used over 17 times and is used regarding the second coming of Christ.

For Christians, advent has two meanings: Celebrating the first arrival of Christ and anticipating the second arrival of Christ.

Advent is a season of anticipation – anticipating not only the birth of Christ but the consummation of God's kingdom on earth. This will be a time of great joy for all of God's creation.

Advent is a time in which we share in the longing of all those who lived in the distant past. Just like today, many of us are longing for redemption and liberation, for the manifestation of

God's love, peace and unity, for God to bring His justice to the nations.

And just like all those in Israel who were waiting for the One who was to come, to free them from their need and disruption, from sin, from their lack of fellowship, from their lost condition, so that they might come to God – so too we eagerly await the Messiah, King of peace and justice, the world ruler of love and joy who will reign.

This was the expectation of old, and this is what we think of when we approach the season of Jesus' birth.

But what happens to many of us as we prepare to celebrate this wondrous birth of our Saviour? Is it a time of peace and hope or.....

In the midst of your conversations you are interrupted by the text sound or the tweek noise or something else coming from someone's phone in their pocket or bag? Are you distracted?

Hi I'm doing (beep notification noise) fine thanks, how are (buzzing) you? It's like you have to rush the conversation before the next (ping ping) goes off.

And if you are also on Social media trying to watch cute images of dogs or something, then ads come up to entice you to click on this, buy this, like this.....

So for many this coming season, this is what it is like.

Anxiety – exhaustion, anxiety – distraction, anxiety – urgency – anxiety – aah!

It is a no-win situation – you often end up feeling pushed and pulled with anxiety about the future – so exhausting.

And added to this pattern is the impact the Pandemic has had on us destabilizing our lives, leading to uncertainty.

Reading: Matthew 24:36-44

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.

You may be thinking – that is a strange passage to read for Advent, but I hope to help you understand what it means.

Many people misunderstand what Jesus was saying. It sounds a bit scary – 2 in the field – one will be taken and one will be left. 2 women grinding meal together – one will be taken and one will be left.

And you may ask – so who gets taken and why, who gets left and why? If you get taken where do you go? If you get left behind what happens to you?

Jesus used parables. One third of the recorded sayings of Jesus in the Gospels are in parables. And if you don't understand them you miss what may be known about the historical Jesus.

Jewish rabbis spoke in parables, thus so did Jesus. Parables were used to ensure that the general population would understand and grasp the message.

For this passage we need to understand the context in which Jesus was talking and Matthew was writing to understand it.

Jesus words were a warning. He wanted the people to link what was happening to the time when He returns in the future.

At that time the oppressive Roman Empire was ruling. And people had experienced the Roman troops marching through and taking one man and leaving the other, taking one woman

and leaving the other. Not such good news except Jesus is saying in the midst of crisis He is coming back.

He is saying to be prepared – just as John the Baptist urged – prepare ye the way of the Lord, repent and be baptized, all of you.

Jesus tells us to keep awake. He is not intending for us to fear or be anxious about His return – but to be prepared and ready. If we are, then we will be the person that is taken to be with Him. But we need not fear for we will be surrounded by His love and grace.

You see, there will be no news channel flashing on the screen - Breaking News – Jesus has returned.

You don't have to keep your phone on all the time in case you miss Jesus' text message.

What Jesus is saying is simply to be ready. We are living on the edge of that new day, beginning when Christ shall return. And with His return Christ will take away all sickness, pain, injustice, poverty and restore all things.

For us today, advent can add such a rich depth to our faith as we remind ourselves with questions such as:

- What does it mean to live a life under the conviction that Christ could return at any moment?

- Am I leading a life that shows I am preparing for the return of the King?
- Am I helping to bring in the King's rule by how I act now?
- Am I spreading the message in word and deed that the King is coming back for those who live according to His ways?

The first advent was truly wonderful. In it we saw a King who came to take away the sins of the earth. Though He was mocked at His death and crowned with thorns, He rose triumphantly from the dead and now reigns as King of all kings! But this is only the first act of God's grand play – there is a second act – the return of the King.

The first presents have been passed out: forgiveness, new life, the Holy Spirit...but life in its full expression with God has yet to happen.

We are living on the edge of that new day beginning when Christ shall return. And with His return Christ will take away all sickness, pain, injustice, poverty and restore all things.

In light of all this, our lives must reflect a love of others, taking care of His people, doing His work on earth both within the church and outside it. We must help others prepare for the King's return.

We help fight against injustice, sickness, poverty because we know when our King returns, these are the things He does not permit in His kingdom.

Advent and the Christmas story is one of *Parousia* – the arrival of a king, the King of Kings, Jesus Christ.

I encourage us all to actively participate in celebrating and anticipating Advent.

Let's encourage each other as we move into December this year by focusing our hearts on these two truths: Christ has come and He will come again.

Prayer:

Dear God, as we enter a time of preparation for Christmas this year, we ask that you would stir our hearts to live with a joyous anticipation – expecting Christ's return, and to stir our hearts with thanksgiving as we celebrate the gift of life that is Christ Jesus.

Thank you for sending Your Son for us. We ask that He would be our King in every area of our lives, leading and guiding us in His way. We come under His rule and reign and ask that you would help us extend His kingdom by loving and reminding others that the King shall return.

Amen.

I am providing everyone with a star and a date on it.

On the board leading into the hall we are going to develop our Advent Calendar.

It begins on November 29th and finishes on December 25th.

Enough stars for 26 people.

What I encourage you to do is to write one word or phrase on your star that reflects the meaning of Advent for you.

By Christmas Day we will have our calendar filled and telling people all about Advent.