

December 3, 2023
First Sunday in Advent
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Isaiah 64:1-9 (1 Corinthians 1:3-89; Mark 11:1-10)

JESUS COMES TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today we begin the New Church Year with the season of Advent. Many people are completely unaware of the Church's season of Advent. For those who *are* aware, some think Advent is only about preparing for Christmas. It is true, there're gatherings to be planned, gifts to buy, and cards to send, but the season of Advent is a season of repentance and hope to keep us focused on what's most important: the *coming* of our Lord and King, Jesus.

The word "*advent*" is derived from the Latin word meaning "*to come*." So while some think Advent is all about a sweet little baby born in the manger, it really focuses on Christ's "*coming*" to His people... *coming* in three different ways: in the past, in the present, and in the future.

If you're like me, you probably have days when you wish Jesus would *come* really soon... like today or tomorrow. Because sometimes it feels like God is absent in our world and no one is in control. We see:

- worldwide human atrocities, genocide, and war;
- shootings in the streets, and at schools and at churches;
- and open persecution of Christians and Christian doctrines of faith.

Closer to home there are:

- loved ones suffer from addiction and financial turmoil;
- sexual immorality and perversions that are offensive to God are celebrated;
- relationships and marriages are being destroyed;
- and if you live long enough, Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, and cancer might be on the horizon.

Some days we just want God to rend the heavens and come down and intervene. But as King Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun. Famous men of history, like Moses, Elijah, and Job, felt the same way. There were times that they were barely hanging on – while it appeared that God was not listening. We hear that sentiment in our Old Testament text this morning.

God had set the prophet Isaiah as a watchman in Jerusalem. Normally, watchmen are stationed in the towers of valuable and beautiful cities – like the Jerusalem that King Solomon had constructed. But the Jerusalem that Isaiah foresees is a future Jerusalem. It's a desolate city gutted by war. Some of its residents have been killed, some have fled to Egypt, and others have been deported to Babylon. Those who remain in the city are few. Just like you and me, when we

think that God is absent or He doesn't care, Isaiah cries out to God in prayer that God would destroy the enemies who have caused the destruction of God's own people and His temple. He wants the perpetrators to tremble in the presence of the Lord and receive the wrath that they've earned. He prays:

“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence!” (Isaiah 64:1-2)

How many times do you feel this same way? You want to cry out:

“God, rend the heavens and come down... do something to the unbelievers who persecute me. Punish those who cause my family trouble and strife. Do something about all these people of perversion who are setting bad examples for our kids and leading them astray. Do something about the evil in the world.”

But you and I can learn something from the watchman's prayer. Suddenly... in mid-prayer... the watchman has an “*ah ha!*” moment. He recognizes that the mess that they're sitting in – is not the enemy's fault. It's not God's fault. It's their own fault!

He prays:

“Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” (Isaiah 64:5-6)

The watchman experiences his own season of Advent. Remembering the promises of God the Father, he comes to God with a repentant heart, asking for forgiveness and reconciliation of his nation, praying:

“But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8)

It's the watchmen's “*ah ha!*” moment. It's your “*ah ha!*” moment. You and I are no different than those whom we wish God would pour out upon His wrath. You and I are the sinners. You and I are the unbelievers, the persecutors, and among the fornicators and adulterers who cause trouble and strife. Isaiah rightly describes you and me as repulsive people who are unclean, and all our righteous deeds are as putrid and polluted as filthy rags. Shall we be saved? By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, by all means, yes!

Advent is a season of repentance and hope. The watchman in our text looks forward to the ***coming*** salvation of the Lord, and indeed, in God's own time, He delivered His people out of Babylon, back into Jerusalem. God forgave their unfaithfulness for the sake of the One who is to come, as Isaiah had also foretold. The One whom:

“the Lord... laid on... the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6; cf: Isaiah 52:13–53:12)

It was some five hundred years after God's people returned to Jerusalem, at the proper time, a child was born in Bethlehem. Childbirth is good news of great joy. Family and friends look forward to a child's future and what they might accomplish with their life. But this wasn't just

any ordinary Child. He is the only begotten Son of God, who for us men and for our salvation **came** down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man. He is born King of kings and Lord of lords, in whom all mankind is blessed because of not only His accomplishments in His life, but also His accomplishments in His death.

This is why we hear the Palm Sunday Gospel on this first Sunday in Advent. Advent begins by keeping us focused on the cross of Christ Jesus. Death was never God's plan in anyone's life... except for this Child. This Child was born to die. It was God's plan even before the Child was born. Our Lord God spoke through His prophet Zechariah, saying:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation...”

(Zechariah 9:9)

Old Testament prophesy is fulfilled as King Jesus rides into battle, humbly seated on a colt.

“And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!’” (Mark 11:9–10)

He is the Prophet of whom the prophets foretold was to **come**. He is the King the people had been waiting for. He is the King you need. As glorious and triumphant as His entry into Jerusalem was, it was an advent of humility and weakness. He is the King who enters Jerusalem, the place of sacrifice, to be the sacrifice. He is the King whose throne was a cross and whose crown was made of thorns. He is the King who wages war on behalf of His people – and – even on behalf of His enemies. He is the King who rides willingly alone into battle to conquer sin by becoming our Sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:21) He comes to suffer and die as God's ultimate Passover Lamb. He is the One who literally lays down His life to save the world.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you have sins beyond measure, and your righteousness is like filthy rags. Cry out to God in repentance. Pray with the watchman:

“Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever.” (Isaiah 64:9)

The prophets foretold of the **coming** Messiah and He indeed **came** in the past, shedding His blood on the cross to reconcile you with the Father in heaven. He forgives you of your sins of being among the persecutors, the fornicators, and adulterers... sins of causing trouble and strife. He **came** to you in Baptismal waters where your putrid and polluted rags were washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. (cf: Revelation 7:14) Because of Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death on your behalf:

“... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)

Don't be deceived. While it may seem that God is absent from our world, Christ also **comes** to you today right where He promises to be: in the proclamation of His Word, in His promises made you in your Baptism, in His Holy Absolution, and in His body and blood in His Holy Supper, all sustaining you in the truth faith until the Last Day when Jesus will come again in

glory to raise the living and the dead unto eternal life with Him in heaven. So, until that day, in repentance and hope, you come to God asking for forgiveness and reconciliation, praying:

“... O Lord, you are [my] *Father*; [I am] *the clay*, and you are [my] *potter*; [I am] *the work of your hand*.” (Isaiah 64:8)

Indeed, you are not only the work of His hand, but Scripture also teaches us that:

“... we are *his workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8–10)

Just as Christ came into the world, not to be served – but to serve, as a baptized believer in Christ, you now can serve and love others with your works and deeds, just as God in Christ serves and loves you. By the regeneration of the Holy Spirit:

“It is no longer [you] *who live[s]*, but Christ who lives in [you].” (Galatians 2:20)

You no longer have to conform to the world... living as an enemy of God. God has given you the tools to live a new and virtuous life. In our Epistle text Paul writes:

“... in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 1:3-9)

Christ Jesus will sustain you with His grace and peace until His **coming** on the Last Day, whether He comes today, tomorrow, next year, or in one hundred years. God’s grace and peace are yours. His peace is a free gift to you for the sake of Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross. It’s the peace that Christ has saved you and has reconciled you to the Father. This Advent and every day, you can await in grace and peace for the coming of Jesus in glory to take you home to live with Him in eternity.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.