

The Rev. Amanda Eiman  
1st Sun of Advent  
[December 3, 2017](#)  
Isaiah 64:1-9, Mark 13:24-37

Good morning/evening!

And Happy Advent.

It's that time of year. If you haven't begun yourself, you've probably witnessed the initial preparations for Christmas. It all starts after Thanksgiving - the holiday lights go up, we get and decorate trees, bake cookies. We plan gifts for friends and family. Greeting cards are sent, homes are decorated greens and reds, whites and gold.

All of these preparations reflect the spirit of the gift coming to us in a few weeks - the gift of the Christ child and the grace and love that we welcome in the manger. The gifts and cheer are given because of the gift of grace and love given to us in Christ at Christmas.

So when we hear the readings selected for our use today, they might seem a bit odd, or unexpected. While we are preparing for the cheer and joy, peace and love that the Christ child brings, we hear the reading from Isaiah:

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down...

So that the mountains quake...

And fire causes water to boil—

And the nations tremble at your presence.

And then the passage from Mark's Gospel.

We are told to keep awake because

One day

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

These readings are filled with descriptions of the coming of Christ, but not for the first time, in the manger. When the heavens open and the mountains shake, the sun darkened, and the moon does not give light, it will be the time when Christ will come again. The day we will refer to in our liturgy in just a bit when we say, “We remember his death, we proclaim his resurrection, we await his coming in glory”.

We hear about this second coming and the stars falling and the moon turning off its light, on a day when we may long for a more comforting image - the coming of a baby. The coming of Christ at Christmas.

Thus, "Advent can be puzzling. So how can we make sense out of it all?

Well, theologian N.T. Wright reminds us that:

"The early Christians developed the church's year as a way of telling, learning and reliving the story of Jesus...As they did so, they came to understand that it wasn't simply a matter of going round and round the same sequence and never getting anywhere.

He says think of a bicycle wheel. It goes round and round, but it is moving forwards, not standing still. The same circuit around the hub of the wheel becomes part of the forward movement of the bicycle as a whole. So it is with the church's year. We go round the circuit:

Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday, Easter,

Pentecost...we are not simply going round and round..and never getting anywhere. We are signing on as part of God's larger project, God's forward purposes, his plans for the whole creation to be renewed, so that...the earth will be full of the knowledge and glory of the Lord.... In Jesus, God brought heaven and earth together, in his second coming, that joining together will be complete. That is the Advent hope.

So the church's year overlaps with itself. In Advent we think our way back to the ancient people of God...to the start of God's rescue operation for a world in ruins and a human race in chaos. We follow the story of Israel's hope...a hope that the first Christians believed had become human in the baby Jesus. With that 'first Advent', it was clear that God's rescue operation... had begun but was not yet completed. Jesus launched God's kingdom on earth...But it was clear...that it would then need to make its way through the...service of Jesus' followers, until the time when Jesus returned to finish the work, to put all things right, to banish evil and death forever, and to bring heaven and earth completely together.

The 'second Advent' then, overlaps with the first. We celebrate Jesus' first coming and use that sense of fulfillment to fuel our hope for his second coming and to strengthen us to work for signs of that kingdom in our own day. We live between the first Advent and the second. That is one way of saying what it means to be a follower of Jesus."

*(Wright, Advent for Everyone, A journey with the Apostles).*

So how can we intentionally live between the first Advent and the second? What actions or mindsets might help us make sense?

Well, keeping a preparatory season may help, and in turn may help us to know Christ and to make Christ known in a uniquely Advent way. And part of that preparatory season may involve some intentional activities. I came across some examples in this week's issue of Living Church, and specifically the article written by Sybil MacBeth. *(Sybil MacBeth, Year Round Advent, Living Church December 3, 2017).*

The first idea Sybil offers is to plant bulbs - you know, paper white narcissus or amaryllis. They are everywhere this time of year in the market, or home stores. Get a clear container with soil or stones -

maybe even use a clear container so you can see the roots as they grow. Plant the bulb and then watch the daily growth of the plant. As you watch, pray about how the growth might reflect the growth and coming of Christ – the first and the second - into our lives.

Or use an Advent calendar. There are paper calendars, downloadable calendars, you can even make your own. If the calendar you choose offers a daily meditation, engage it during a quiet time. Or, if you are creating your own, maybe each day write an Advent word or phrase, or the name of a person for whom you are praying.

How about creating a quiet corner in a portion of your home? Even if you have children! Create a place where people can go to be alone and quiet. A little table in a corner with a candle, maybe a few sprigs of greenery, a purple ribbon, and maybe a timer creates an enticing place for children and adults to be alone and quiet. Light the candle or timer, and sit in the mystery of dark and silence for three minutes. And even if you don't quite add all of these items to your corner, maybe a chair and a window will do. Just sit and wait for a few

minutes.

If you are an artist, color or doodle with blue or purple - the colors of the advent season. If you like to write, do some short and simple creative writing.

You might also obtain an Advent tree or bush - perhaps use your Christmas tree for this - hang some blue or purple decorations for a few weeks before switching to your Christmas themed decor.

And even if you don't choose any of these activities, that is certainly ok! We are gathered here in this season together, preparing to join him and follow him on whatever highway he takes with our hearts, minds, bodies and souls. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to listen to that Spirit and be guided to pray and ponder, in whatever way is meaningful.

As we approach the darkest time of the year in the northern hemisphere, Advent offers a gleam of light, and a hope. A gestation time, not just before Christmas. It also gives us a dress rehearsal for the way to live every day of the year. (Wright and MacBeth).

So prepare, anticipate, journey, hope, repent, expect, trust,  
anticipate, wait, wonder. Be Advent people: people of light in a dark  
world, people of hope in times and places of despair. People who  
follow Jesus. (Wright).

Amen.