

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Week 1



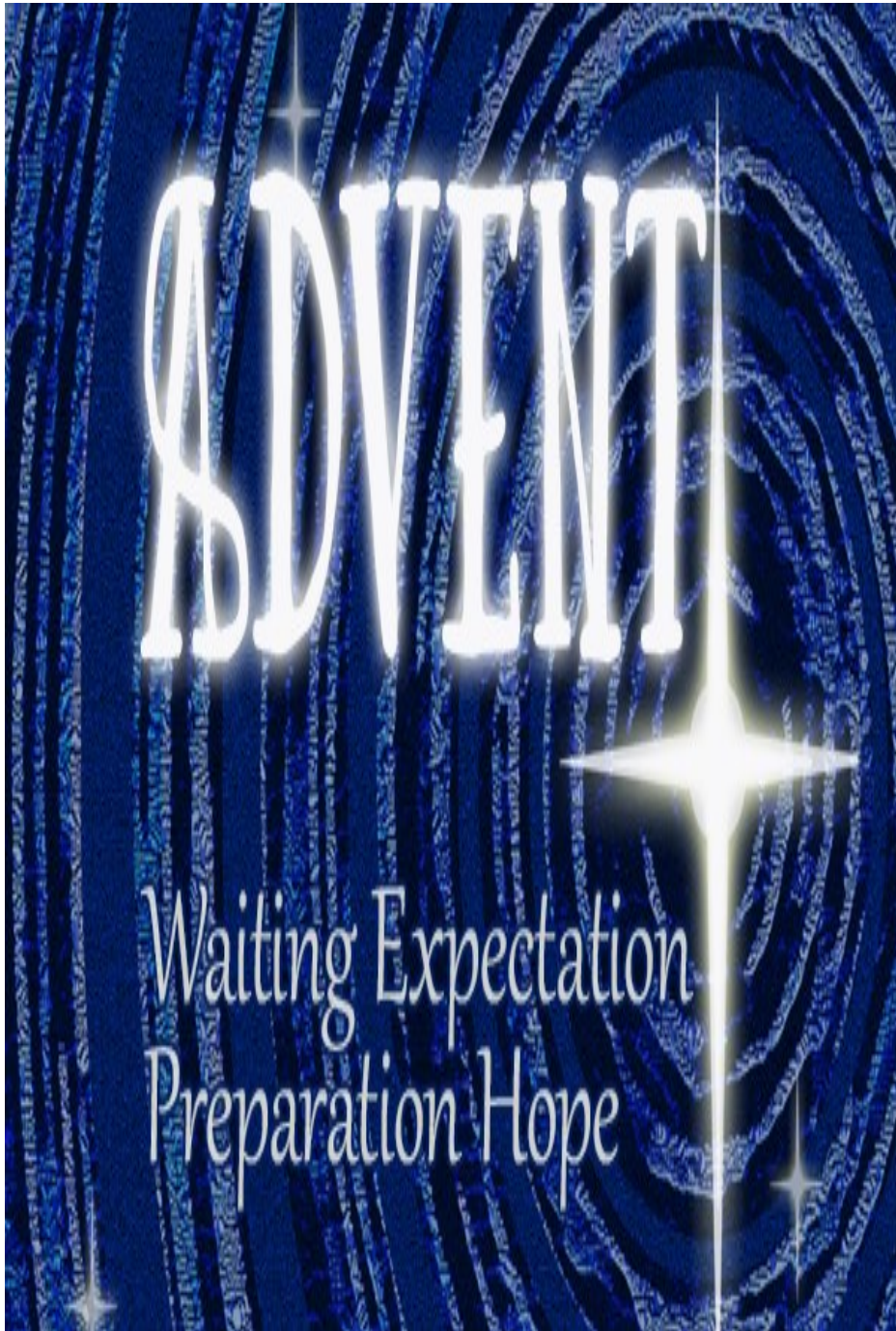
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NOTES

Greetings Bethlehem Family,

I am excited to extend this invitation to you to join your church family on a 2020 Advent devotional journey! This year's journey is marked and marred with challenges (as if we need more in the light of a national epidemic). In the aftermath of an international pandemic, national protests, and a divisive presidential election we are called to:

***HOPE** against hope that our lives and livelihood will return to a sense of normalcy;*

*Find **JOY** in the midst of despair and the untimely and unwarranted deaths of our love ones;*

*Work for **PEACE** and justice in face of systemic racism, sexism, gender discrimination, healthcare disparity, and economic inequity until Jesus returns; and*

*Go high with the **LOVE** of Christ when the enemy goes low preying on human fear, insecurity, and pride.*

We have a tedious journey ahead this month, however the rewards that await us at the finish line will overshadow all we will go through. With God on our side, we are assured that each round will go higher and higher. So much so that in the end, we will not look like what we have been through. Follow alongside in the daily readings, reflections, and prayers as God will each day prepare our hearts for the "GIFT that will keep on giving!" I hope to see you along the way!

Growing in Grace,

Pastor White

Sunday, November 29, 2020 - First Sunday of Advent

Mark 13:24-37 (CEV)

“So watch out and be ready! You don’t know when the time will come.” (Mark 13:33)

For many of us it may feel as if we went to sleep on March 15, 2020 and woke up that following Monday morning in a totally new world. Did we fall asleep when we should have been awake? What happened to turn our world as we know it “upside down”? Without warning we found ourselves “on lock down”, bound to our homes indefinitely. We were told that all activities had to be curtailed. The simple actions we used to perform such as going to the gym, out to dinner or even to the grocery store has become a major task requiring us to wear masks and even gloves. We have stocked up on toilet paper and cleaning products, in anticipation of the coming virus. In the back of our minds, the question is raging, “why do we have to live like this”? Who fell asleep and let the enemy descend upon us and change our lives?

In today’s text, Jesus wanted His disciples to be prepared for the changes that would eventually destroy their world as they knew it. Today, this warning affects us as well. We have learned that it is difficult adjusting to unexpected changes. Jesus wanted to assure us that regardless of how the world may change in our lifetime, His Word will never change. In this Advent Season as we wait for His return we must constantly remind ourselves that even in the midst of COVID-19, we can depend on God.

Prayer: Quiet our minds that we may watch for you. Expose our sins that we may repent and prepare for You. Open our eyes that we may recognize and welcome You. Lord, hear our prayers and come to us, bringing light into the darkness of our hearts; for you live and reign now and forever. Amen!

Cont... Friday December 4, 2020

Minister Marilyn Collins

It is the fundamental belief of Christians that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilot, was crucified, He died, and was buried, on the third day, He rose from the grave with all power over life and death in His hand. He remained on earth for forty days and ascended into Heaven, He now sits on the right hand of the Father, where He intercedes on His children’s behalf.

As Christians we bear Christ’s name and what a glorious thing because we are His joint heirs. Mark 9:41 tells us *“For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.”*

Can you think of a better name to be called than a “Christian?”

Prayer

Father, we come to you at this time acknowledging your truth that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Father, thank-you for the gift of Jesus Christ and the honor to be known as a Christian. Amen



Friday December 4, 2020

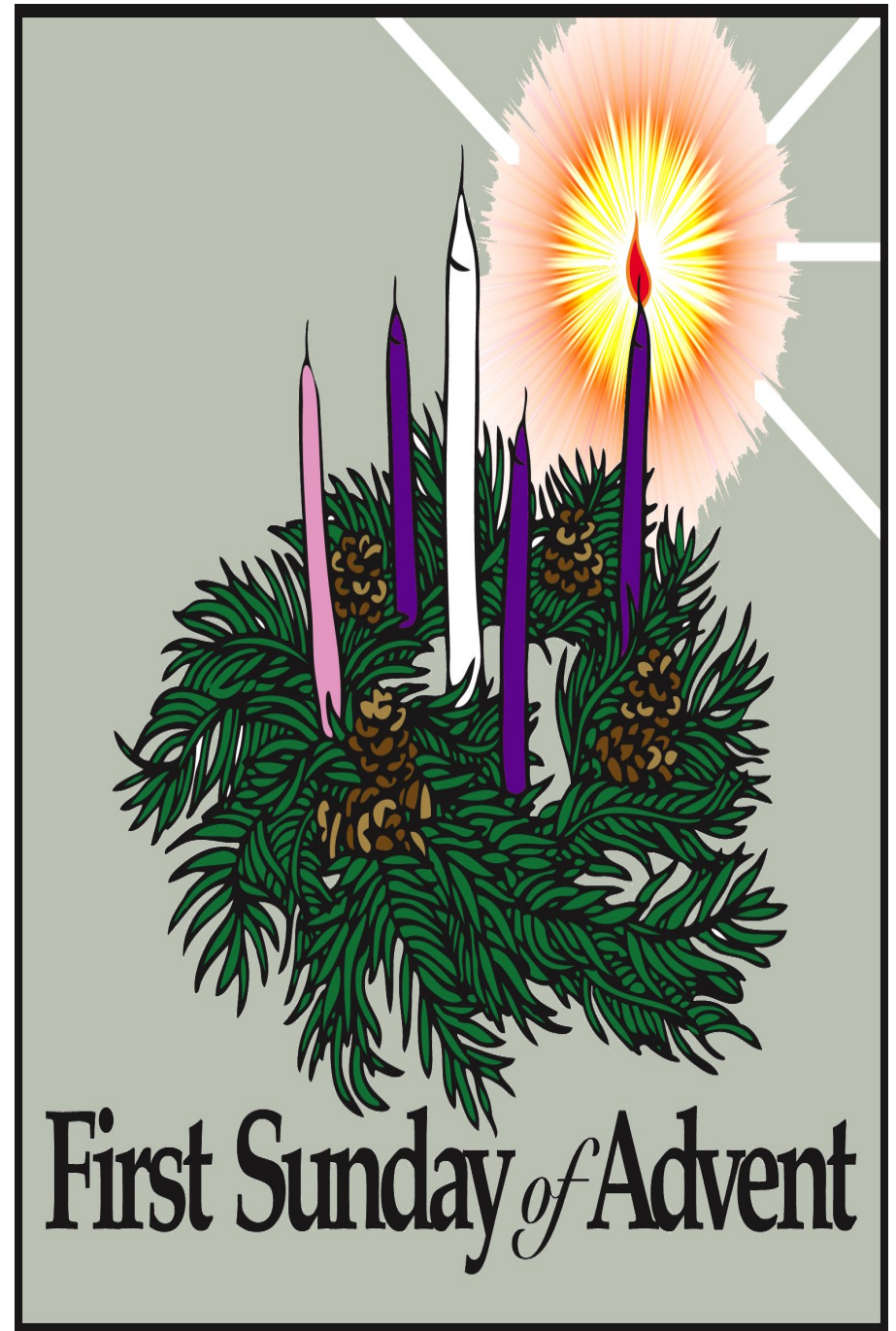
Minister Marilyn Collins

Acts 11:19-26

“And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass that for a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught many people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. “ (KJV Acts 11:26)

During the time when the followers of Jesus were scattered after the stoning of Stephen, they traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching Christ. And while in these places they spoke the word of the Lord only to their own, the Jews. Acts 11:19-20 tells us, *“But, there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greek also, preaching the Lord Jesus.”* The word *“Christian”* was first used in Antioch when the gospel message of Jesus Christ came to Antioch.

There are some historians who believe that the word *“Christian”* was used by unbelievers as a *“term of ridicule.”* However, little did they know that it was God who named them such because it could only have happened if God had intended and purposed it beforehand, therefore it can be thought of as being divinely inspired. As God’s Word tells us in Philippians 2:13 *“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”* Therefore, it was God’s move on His people to identify Christ’s followers as Christians. As we move into this Advent season, let us remember that Advent is a time of spiritual reflection on the important foundations of our Christian faith. Christmas in some circles literally means *“Christ Mass”* and, in some circles, *“Christian Mass”*.



Monday, November 30, 2020

Minister Marilyn Collins

Revelation 15:1-8

“And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.” (Rev. 15:2 KJV)

As we enter this Advent Season, a season of hope, as joint heirs in Jesus Christ we rejoice over His birth. Jesus came through forty and two generations through the seed of a woman, the Virgin Mary and was born free from sin. Yet, Jesus took on the sins of the world and paid the ultimate sacrifice through the shedding of His blood, His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the grave when He rose with all power over life and death in His hand. Jesus is a key player in God’s plan for the reconciliation and redemption of man after sin entered the world. Jesus is the one who is large and in charge of God’s plan to save all humanity and to reconcile and redeem humanity back to Him.

In the Book of Revelation, John, the author of Revelation shares his vision of what he observes after he is told to “come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter” (Rev. 4:1). This statement serves as a prelude to the rapture of the church, Christ’s bride. We, who are believers in Christ will one day be caught up with Christ in the clouds. We will have fought the good fight between good and evil, served as witnesses to the goodness of the Lord, and given our testimony of “how great is the Lord”. Those left behind will endure great tribulations while still on earth but there is still hope for victorious living and the gift of eternal life through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Savior.



Thursday December 3 2020

Brenda Faison

Faithfully Waiting 1 Thessalonian 1:2-10

“They also tell how you are waiting for his Son Jesus to come from heaven. God raised him from death, and on the day of judgment Jesus will save us from God’s anger.” 1 Thessalonians 1:10 (CEV)

I do not like to wait. I know that we have to wait for things in this life but I must admit that waiting is not one of my virtues. I will often arrive at an event early to keep from having to wait in a long line to get in. I planned to go grocery shopping early in the morning in the height of the pandemic to avoid standing in long lines at the cashier counter. I typically avoid “waiting” at all cost. This past election year however, proved to be one in which I found myself patiently waiting for over one hour just to vote for the candidate of my choice. Although, it was 85 degrees, I patiently waited in a long line and did not complain. Why was I willing to deviate from my normal behavior and wait patiently to vote?

Like the people of Thessalonica, I was waiting with a purpose. Although my purpose for waiting was temporary, the people of Thessalonica knew that their waiting would impact eternity. They were waiting for the return of Jesus Christ. He had been crucified by Pontius Pilate, lain in a borrowed tomb for three days and had been raised from the dead by God. They knew of people who had actually talked to Him after the resurrection. He was returning to earth to save them from God’s anger. They therefore were waiting with anticipated excitement. Like the Christians of Thessalonica in this Advent Season, we are to wait with great anticipation for the return of Jesus Christ. We do not know the day or hour of His return but we do know that He promised to return for His people. As we wait His return we will strive to glorify Him in our lives each day.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for the gift of hope as we wait for your return. We know that even in a world that appears to be void of hope, You bring new mercies to our lives each morning. We are forever grateful for the blessings of life that you bestow upon us each day. Help us to continue to wait with expectancy of your return this season. Amen.



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There is no haste while we wait holding onto His promises of *hope, joy, love* and *peace* that Advent brings. We know that our waiting is not be in vain as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. Watchfully waiting and praying with a pure and open heart that God, who gives hope, will bless us with complete happiness and peace because of our faith. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, He will fill us with hope. {Rom 15:13}

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for your unconditional love. Help me to learn to wait patiently for the return of our risen Savior. Keep me alert to the signs of His return. Enable me to live daily free from anxiety and stress of this ever changing world. Continue to remind me of the hope I have in you. Amen.



God's word will still be preached on earth after the rapture and those left behind on earth *will* have an opportunity to accept Christ as their Savior. And if they do, they will stand on a sea of glass having gotten victory over the beast, his image, his mark, and the number of his name. They will be caught up in heaven and given harps to sing the song of Moses the Servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying "Great and marvelous are thou works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. (Rev. 3).

So, what do you think? Did Mary know that her baby boy would one day walk on water, save our sons and daughters, that the child she delivered, would soon deliver her and so many others? Let us pray.

Prayer

Father in Heaven, we give our highest praises to You, for You alone are worthy.

You Lord are the one who was, who is, and who is to come.

Thank you, Lord, for salvation and making us a part of

God's redemptive plan for all humanity.

As each day comes and goes, help us to remember the

goodness of you and to sing praises to your name.

Amen



Tuesday December 1, 2020

Brenda T. Faison

Revelation 18:1-10

“Then I heard another voice from heaven shout, My people, you must escape from Babylon. Don’t take part in her sins and share her punishment.”

Rev. 18:4 (CEV)

The early Church celebrated the first coming of Christ and the Second Coming of Christ with great joy. It appears that 21st century Christians love to celebrate the first coming of Christ but tend to shy away from celebrating the second coming of Christ. As a result, we often see many reminders of the first coming in our stores at Christmas and on the internet but little or no reminders of the second coming. Our churches are quick to display the nativity scene or retell the story of the birth of Jesus found in Luke but there is usually no mention of the second coming of Christ.

Is it possible that we fail to talk about the second coming because we fear His return? The Bible assures us that His return will not be the calm and serene “manger scene” but the scene of anger and judgment. Christ will return to wage war with Satan and to judge those persons who have failed to serve Him in this life.

Revelation 18 tells the people of God to separate themselves from those who have failed to follow the Lamb. We are admonished to not take part in the sins of the rich and disobedient. The Advent Season therefore is a period of preparation. It is a time for us to line up lives with the Word of God. Let us prepare room in our hearts each day to receive our coming King by removing those things in our lives that do not reflect Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to die to ourselves so that we may better serve thee. Help us to serve you as you deserve and to give and not to count the cost. Amen.



Wednesday December 2, 2020

Minister Jacqueline Coker

Luke 21:34-38

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.” Luke 21:34

One thing I have come to know and understand about myself is that waiting exposes my inability to be patient. It slows down my ever-racing thoughts, interferes with deadlines and sometimes causes my focus to shift or subconsciously give up hope. Hmm, I wonder if waiting has the same effect on you? What “hope” have you given up on this year? As you ponder, let’s welcome in Advent, the watchful waiting season for the already coming King. Advent allows us to look inward as we fix our eyes upward and invite our Lord in the waiting rooms of our lives. As we look inward we experience the transformative power of God, using our impatient abilities as a spiritual discipline. Overall, this developed discipline of patience has been cultivated in the “waiting”; which has become an inescapable part of our lives. Watchfully we wait in hope, anticipating and carefully remaining focused on our coming King.

In today’s passage Jesus calls us to an awareness, providing a strong warning to be focused and to be prepared for His return. He urges us to be careful, or our hearts will be weighed down with partying, drunkenness and the anxieties of life; and that, “that day” will close on us suddenly like a trap. Jesus understands exactly what can happen as we attempt to wait on our own merit without being disciplined. He gently reminds us to always *watch* and *pray* so we can escape the scheme of the evil one and be able to stand before Him on that glorious day.

In the spirit of the Advent season, our hearts are ready to celebrate the first coming of our Savior. In joyful hope, we wait knowing, watching and praying that King Jesus will answer our prayers. We wait knowing that our soon coming King will readily and willingly heal, deliver, provide and strengthen us. We wait on him because he has taught us to trust in him alone and stand on His Word. Imagine, our joy when we stand before the King of kings and Lord of lords on that day knowing that when waiting weighed heavily on our hearts we stood on His Word.

