

Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
Advent I  
November 29, 2020  
rmcneely+

The night is far spent  
The day is at hand  
Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness  
And let us put on the armour of light.

We begin a new Church year today  
Vested in the penitential color of violet  
looking backward to the Birth of Our Lord  
And looking forward to the day of His coming again  
to judge the world at the end of time.  
Both of these tremendous and signal events of past and future  
We experience as eternally present realities.  
The very essence of the Advent Season.

So this is a time of both joy and introspection.  
Joy for the incarnation  
The coming of the Son of God in human form  
God with Us.  
In the personification of our salvation  
Introspection into our lives  
A time of personal contrition  
The removal of the tarnish of sin from our souls  
By confession and absolution  
In preparation for the feast of the Birth of Christ, and  
In preparation for his coming again  
At the end of time  
To judge the Earth  
For our entrance into Paradise.

The Gospel of the day may seem misplaced at first  
It is St Matthew's account of Jesus' triumphal entry  
Into Jerusalem.

We are transported and  
 We experience with them the great Joy and excitement  
 Of the Messiah  
 Coming to their salvation  
 (although not perhaps in the form their salvation would take)

Immediately, however, events did not occur as they might have expected.

Their joy and exuberance at His coming  
 Was soon mixed with their quandary  
 surrounding His seeming anger  
 with the moneychangers and merchants  
 in the Temple courtyard.

Shouts of “Hosannah in the highest”  
 Were tempered by the enforcement of a greater morality.  
 “My house shall be called a house of prayer  
 but ye have made it a den of thieves”.

So what might, at first, seem to be a misplaced Gospel reading  
 Actually is the perfect Gospel for the Day.

For it contains the joy of the arrival of the Son of God  
 Which we who know and celebrate as His Birth;  
 At the stable manger in Bethlehem.

And the notion of the Judgment Day  
 As Jesus marks His First Coming as the Judge of Jerusalem  
 Come to condemn and cleanse God’s Temple.  
 It foreshadows His second appearance at the end of time  
 When He will come to judge all history.

St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, today’s Epistle  
 Focuses us on the last 5 Commandments  
 Perhaps the second stone Tablet containing  
 The 5 commandments dealing with sins against each other  
 And the overriding Summary Commandment of Jesus:  
 “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”.

Paul declares that to love one's neighbor is to fulfill the law.  
And he writes of the urgency of it all:

“it is high time to awake out of sleep  
for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed.”

Paul often writes in the analogy of being clothed.

In today's Epistle he advises  
To “cast off the works of darkness”  
And “put on the armour of light.”  
“Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ”.

In today's Epistle Paul all but shouts the standard  
by which a Christian  
must live the life given by God.

A clear warning of the consequence for failure.  
Sage advice as we consider the end of our lives  
And the judgement day.

The collect, the Advent Collect, composed in 1549  
read every day from now until Christmas Eve;  
While bowing to the Birth of Christ,  
Emphasizes the immediacy of the end times.  
And exhorts us to cast off the works of darkness  
The sins of our lives and of the world  
And put on the armour of light.  
To, as well as we are able, live the life of Christ .  
All in preparation for His Coming.

If I were to be allowed a favorite Season of the Christian Year  
It might well be the mysterious Season of Advent.

There is something compelling about the confluence of

Joy and Judgment

Past and future

The symbols of His Coming

The Christmas Trees

The lights

The Star of Bethlehem that guided the Maji

The Angels that heralded His Birth

and announced to the shepherds

The Crèche, a legacy of St Francis

The music of the Season

From our Hymnal

O Come O Come Emmanuel

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Lo He Comes with Clouds Descending

Handel's Messiah

At its opening section

When fully understood in their historical context

All tell of a time when people were able to live their beliefs.

As we approach the feast of Christmas

And we are surrounded by the remnants of Christian culture

Even if by people who have lost the meaning

Of the symbols they publish.

I think of the atheists and pagans among us.

And wonder if deep in their hearts

they ask if they have not missed something quite wonderful.

And I see in my mind's eye Michael Angelo's painted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome.

In one corner he depicts his vision of the judgment day.

It is magnificent

Trumpets sounding the end of time

Jesus shown as the eternal judge over all history.

Michael Angelo painted one man who realizes he is among the damned.

It is as though he has suddenly realized  
 That it is really all true.  
 His face expresses his shock  
 His horror.  
 He realizes he is among the damned.  
 God, whom he had conscientiously denied,  
     Rationalized away,  
     Is  
     Very Real.  
     And it is all true.

So as we, of St Thomas' cross the threshold of Advent

May we embrace the Season  
     The mixture of joy and judgment  
 Immerse ourselves in the mystery of Advent  
 Spend a quiet time of introspection  
     Removing the tarnish from our Souls  
     Intimately joining with Our God  
     And seeking absolution of our Sins.  
     Removing all barriers that separate us from Him.

That we may enjoy the miracle of His Birth all over again.  
 That we may approach His Coming Again at the end times  
     With the same Hope and Joy that greeted His Birth.

I guess it has become something of a tradition here at St Thomas'  
     Over the last several years  
 That I tread lightly upon the work of Clement Clarke Moore.

Like everyone, I enjoyed his 1822 Christmas poem for many years.  
 I think it was the introduction of the Santa Claus story into our  
 society  
 And it has been a warm family Christmas tradition for almost 200  
 years now.

But in my clergy life

- I have come to see the poem
- as part of our Societal tradition
- that has diverted us
- from the only actual purpose of the Day
- the Birth of Our Lord.
- And the coming of our Lord Jesus the Christ. God with Us

Let me re-state his beloved poem with an Advent focus and close with this:

T'was the night before Jesus  
 And all through the house  
 Not a creature was praying, Not one in the house  
 Their Bibles were lain on the shelve without care  
 In hopes that Jesus our Sav'our would not soon be there.

The children were dressing to crawl in to bed  
 Not one ever kneeling or bowing a head  
 And Mom in her rocker with cat in her lap  
 Was watching the Late Show, while I took a nap.

When out on the lawn there 'rose such a clatter  
 I sprang to my feet to see what was the matter.  
 Away to the window I flew like a flash  
 Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

When what to my wondering eyes should appear  
 But angels proclaiming that Jesus was here.  
 With a light like the sun sending forth a bright ray  
 I knew in a moment this must be THE DAY!

The light of His face made me cover my head  
 It was Jesus returning, just like He had said.  
 And though I possessed worldly wisdom and wealth  
 I cried when I saw Him, in spite of my self.

In the big Book of Life, which he held in His hand,  
Was written the name of every saved man.  
He spoke not a word as He searched for my name,  
When He said, "it's not here" my head hung in shame.

The people whose names had been written with love  
He gathered to take to His Father above.  
With those who were ready He rose without sound  
While the rest were just left, all standing around.

I fell to my knees, but it was too late.  
I had waited too long and thus sealed my fate.  
I stood and I cried as they rose out of sight  
If only I'd been ready, This one Holy night.

