

Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Advent I
November 28, 2021
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
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.

In Advent, there is tension between joy and fear:
Joy in the new beginning,
Between the Nativity,
the incarnation of our Saviour
And the fear of the day of the end times
Our day of judgment
And its potential for Heaven or Hell.

So this is also a time of both joy and introspection.
Joy for the incarnation
The coming of the Son of God in human form
In the personification of our salvation
God with Us.

And 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.

We vest the clergy and the altar in the penitential color of violet
 Even the liturgy changes to reflect the penitential season
 We omit the *Gloria in excelsis*
 And set a somber tone of contemplation
 We post the Advent wreath
 A circle marking the seamless beginning and ending of life
 With 4 candles,
 One for each of the 4 weeks of the Advent Season
 They stand for the “last 4 things”:
 Death,
 Judgment
 Heaven and Hell.
 Three of them are in the violet color of penitence
 The fourth is rose color to mark the 3rd Sunday of Advent
 Rose Sunday, the Sunday that stands for Heaven
 And we rejoice that day.

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

experience with them the great Joy and excitement
 Of the Messiah
 Coming to their salvation
 (although not perhaps in the form some expected)
 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
 who He finds pitting spiritual things
 to selfish material gain.

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 of 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 the second theme of the day and
 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 Judgment Day.

The collect, the Advent Collect, composed in 1549
 and 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 in the words of Paul
 “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 it's 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 symbols 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 Michaelangelo's 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.

In the gathered crowd
 Michaelangelo painted one man with terror written across his face.
 It is as though he has suddenly realized
 That it is really all true.
 His face expresses his shock
 His horror.
 As 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.
 And may we enjoy the miracle of His Birth all over again.

And may we 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.

