

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
First Sunday in Advent
December 1, 2024
rmcneely+

*Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness
And put on the armour of light*

Did you feel it?
When you walked through those magnificent doors into the Church
just now,
 Did you feel it?
There has been a change.

The altar and the clergy are vested in the penitential color of violet.
The altar flowers are violet too.
The Advent wreath is posted in the sanctuary
 With its three violet and one pink candles
 One for each Sunday in Advent.
The music has changed and points in a single direction:
 He is coming.
The very name of the Season; Advent; means Coming.
In a moment you will notice that the liturgy itself has changed
 The *Gloria in excelsis* is omitted.
There is a sense of anticipation.
Did you feel it?

Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer wrote the Advent
Collect

 And it has survived unchanged all these centuries.
Cranmer eloquently expressed the two contradicting themes of
Advent:
The one, an historic event from the past;
 The Birth of Our Lord.
The other, a future event but firmly lodged in our knowledge;
 The Second Coming of Jesus
 To judge our lives and to make the determination

Whether we spend eternity in Heaven with Him
Or whether we spend eternity in tortured suffering.

However, in Advent we face both the past and the future together
In the present, with the word “Now”.

Cranmer presents it this way:

“now in the time of this mortal life”

In today’s Epistle Paul presents it this way:

“for now is our salvation nearer than we believed”.

The word “Now” ties together the whole—past, future and present.

We face the dual contradiction of Advent

The joy of the Nativity

And Christ born incarnate to save us all

To defeat evil.

And the dread of the Second Coming

And the fateful decision that will rule eternity for us.

Cranmer artfully states it in striking antithesis:

Cast off darkness—put on light

Now—in the last day

Mortal life—life immortal

Great humility—glorious majesty.

So in Advent we face these two,

Joy and apprehension.

Let us leave the joy of the Incarnation and our salvation for another
time closer to the day,

And consider the Second Coming.

So how do we go about surviving the judgment day?

That is the question of Advent.

The answer is entirely within our control.

St Paul gives us sage advice in today’s Epistle

As to how we should live our lives

in order to be among the Saints on the judgment day.

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

Cast off the Works of Darkness

Paul points us toward the evil in our lives
 The snake has been among us since the beginning
 Tempting and beguiling us in subtle ways
 Anything to divert our gaze from the pathway to God
 Satan is the darkness
 And his minions,
 all too often in the form of misled mankind,
 Ceaselessly at work,
 lead us away from God.
 To pull us into sinful habits,
 in small imperceptible steps,
 that inexorably result in significant problems
 in our lives.

Cast them off, Paul counsels;

Cast them off
 As you would stained clothing
 And put on the armour of light

Paul expounds on the armour in his epistle to the Ephesians

That we discussed three weeks ago

Paul draws on the metaphor of light, the antiphon of the darkness

Throughout the Old Testament, light is the spiritual symbol

Of goodness
 Of righteousness
 Of uprightness or blessing

In the Genesis story of the creation

Light was the first thing that God created

It is the symbol of God acting in our lives.

In the New Testament
The light
Is that which points us to Jesus

In telling us to put on the armour of light, Paul is saying:
You have cast away the works of darkness, of evil
Now put on the armour of light
Put on Jesus
Put yourself in Jesus' place
Act like Jesus
Talk like Jesus
Put yourself in Jesus' shoes
And walk your life as Jesus walked.
Help others with the same selfless spirit that was Jesus.

In those times when you are confronted with a decision and you
don't know which path to take:
Do what Jesus would have done.
That is the armour of light that Paul is telling us to put on.

On the Last Day, the Day of Judgment when Jesus comes again
We shall be among the saints
If we have cast away the works of darkness
And put on the armour of light
There will be abundant love in our hearts and souls
With space for God to enter in
And rule our lives.
So that on that last day
Jesus will enter in
And claim us as one of His.

But if our lives are burdened with the blight of our transgressions
from the works of darkness
Our souls tarnished
Our hearts filled with only our selfish selves

How is there room for God in our hearts?

If there is that wall of sin

The impenetrable barrier that divides us from God

How will we ever enter into the Kingdom of God.

How can there be room for the love of God

If hearts are crowded by the blight of sin?

Saint Paul gives us the “airbag” that will save us

from the collision

between the works of darkness and the way of light

He recites the last 5 of the 10 Commandments,

the ones that govern how we treat each other

and summarizes them as Jesus did

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self

Love worketh no ill to his neighbor

Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law”

That is the key

The take-away from the day

The answer to the question of this life

How are we to survive the judgment day.

We are to love one another as Jesus loves us

So the short Season of Advent

Is a time to examine our lives and to seek

God’s forgiveness for our shortcomings.

But sometimes, even with God’s forgiveness we cannot forgive ourselves

We can’t get beyond a sin that haunts us

Sometimes forgiving ourselves is the hardest part.

Let me tell you a story of a Philippine Priest.

A much loved man of God.
 But a man who carried the burden of a secret sin he had
 committed many years ago, in seminary.
 He had repented
 But had no peace
 No sense of God's forgiveness.
 In his parish was a woman who deeply loved God
 Who said she had visions
 In which she conversed with Jesus
 Something highly unusual
 But nothing to be scoffed at either
 The priest was skeptical but he had to know.
 He decided he must test her
 the priest asked that the next time she had the vision
 to ask Jesus what sin her Priest had committed when he was
 in seminary.
 There was that one egregious sin that the priest had in mind.
 He thought it would be a good test of veracity.
 Several weeks later, the parishioner came to the priest and
 said she had the vision.
 The priest inquired whether she asked Jesus about his sin.
 She replied that she had.
 Well, what was His answer the priest asked?
 She said;
 Jesus told me: "I don't remember."

You see, the sin had been forgiven
 And it was gone
 Even from memory. Even from Heaven.
 That is the way of our forgiven sins.
 Any way that is best for you to understand it
 Washed by the blood of the lamb
 Cast away
 as far as East is from East and West from west
 Blotted out

Or any of the other ways that Jesus has put it.
They are gone as if they had never happened.

So in Advent we prepare for the Second Coming
As we do in Lent
Repenting of our sins
and we wait.

Like everyone, I enjoyed the 1822 Christmas poem of Clement
Clarke Moore for many years.
It may have been the introduction of the Santa Claus story into our
society
And it has been a warm family Christmas tradition for over 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

It has become something of a tradition here at St Thomas and it is
such a fitting conclusion to this First Sunday in Advent I feel
compelled to do so again;
So with not much apology to
Mr. Moore

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.