



And so the Lectionary Cycle begins again. This is always an exciting and moving time, as we prepare ourselves for the journey ahead, and begin to open our hearts to a new experience of transformation. Year A is, in a sense, a double beginning, because it starts not just a new year, but also the start of the three year cycle as well.

As is usual for this time of year, the Lectionary begins with our hope in Christ, the coming of God's reign in Christ, and the challenge for us to live from this hope, remembering God's comings in the past, recognising God's comings now, and awaiting God's comings into our future. Just this one day, if embraced mindfully and wholeheartedly, can change us forever.

This week, let's celebrate and open ourselves to the power of God's gift of hope in Christ.

The First Sunday of Advent Year A - December 1, 2019

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

The First Reading - Isaiah 2: 1-5

The Bible tells us much about God's past dealings with his people. All our readings in the Advent Season speak of the future in God's ultimate will. Even for Isaiah, in turbulent times, there is expectancy and the hope of peace, when all people shall come together to worship the one who comes to us in holiness.

The Psalm - Psalm 122

The Second Reading - Romans 13:11-14

Isaiah and all Israel expected a new age of the Messiah. For Paul's readers as for us, the new time has come - not yet in its fullness, but begun in the coming of Jesus Christ. Our behaviour must therefore be suitable to these decisive times, nearer every day to the Christ who will come again.

The Gospel Reading - Matthew 24:36-44

In this new church year, the Gospel on most Sundays will be from that of Matthew. Here, Jesus has some warnings for his disciples about the final coming of the son of Man. His kingdom will mean a separation between those who are expectant and those left unprepared. God may refuse those who eternally refuse him.

[Click here to view the readings](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%202:%201-5%0Acw%20Psalm%20122%0ARomans%2013:11-14%0AMatthew%2024:36-44)

[http://bible.oremus.org/?](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%202:%201-5%0Acw%20Psalm%20122%0ARomans%2013:11-14%0AMatthew%2024:36-44)

[show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%202:%201-5%0Acw%20Psalm%20122%0ARomans%2013:11-14%0AMatthew%2024:36-44](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%202:%201-5%0Acw%20Psalm%20122%0ARomans%2013:11-14%0AMatthew%2024:36-44)

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

See also Parish Resource Pack for Advent on CNI for alternate form and additional resources.

ADULT: Today is the first Sunday of Advent - the time when we prepare once again for the coming of Jesus.

CHILD/YOUTH: We light a candle each week to remind us that Jesus brings light into the dark places of the world.

ADULT: Today, the prophet Isaiah describes a future shaped by peace for

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all nations as they walk in the light of the Lord. We wait in hope for this prophecy to be fulfilled..

CHILD/YOUTH: We light the candle of hope to proclaim that God's light is coming into the world
A purple candle is lit .

PRAYER: God of all nations - you spoke to Isaiah and you empowered him to speak welcome words of peace and hope to the people of his time. We need to hear your word anew to us today as the darkness of despair is still experienced wherever peace and hope is absent.

Strengthen us with the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may be your prophets in this day and age - teaching your ways and lifting people's darkness through words and work of love and peace and justice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

ADVENT COLLECT

This collect is said after the Collect of the day until Christmas Eve.

Almighty God,
Give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness,
and put upon us the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which thy Son Jesus Christ
came to visit us in great humility;
that in the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty
to judge both the quick and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who liveth and reigneth with thee
and the Holy Spirit, now and ever.

O Lord,
Raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us,
and with great might succour us;
that whereas, through our sins and wickedness,

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we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us,
thy bountiful grace and mercy
may speedily help and deliver us;
through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord,
to whom with thee and the Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory, world without end.
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who liveth and reigneth with thee
and the Holy Spirit, now and ever.

Father in heaven,
who sent your Son to redeem the world
and will send him again to be our judge:
Give us grace so to imitate him
in the humility and purity of his first coming
that when he comes again,
we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Almighty God,
Give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light
now in the time of this mortal life
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
that on the last day
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

P Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

P Heavenly Father, as we begin this new church year, instill within us confidence to trust in Your mercy, goodness, and guidance. Keep us faithful to You and fervent in our witness. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

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P You promise to provide all that we need to support our body and life. Help us to so order our lives that we may not give into temptations to greed, but that we may live lives of charity and generosity toward our neighbours. Lord, in Your mercy.

C hear our prayer.

P Grant wisdom to _____ our Queen, _____ our President, and _____ our mayor, that they may govern with good judgment and serve the welfare of all. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Comfort and strengthen those who are sick, in body, mind or in spirit, with the sure and certain hope of Your presence in the midst of their distress. (*Bless especially...*) Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Guide and direct your church, O Lord, that called and gathered by Your Word and Sacraments, we may bear witness as the body of Christ to those who do not yet know You. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Keep us in communion with your saints of every time and every place, who bore witness to Your appearing, (*especially...*) and who now rest in the blessed peace of Your presence. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

P Amen.

POST COMMUNION

God our deliverer,
Awaken our hearts
to prepare the way for the advent of your Son,
that, with minds purified by the grace of his coming,
we may serve you faithfully all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord; that, when he shall appear, he may not find us

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sleeping in sin but active in his service and joyful in his praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord,
here you have nourished us with the food of life.
Through our sharing in this holy sacrament
teach us to judge wisely earthly things
and to yearn for things heavenly.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

God of justice and peace,
from the heavens you rain down mercy and kindness,
that all on earth may stand in awe and wonder
before your marvelous deeds.
Raise our heads in expectation,
that we may yearn for the coming day of the Lord
and stand without blame before your Son, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

We seek the mighty God
in the most unlikely places
as a child in a stable,
and in an empty tomb.
May God hear these prayers,
which come from the unlikely corners of our lives.
Give us ears to hear, O God,
and eyes to watch,
that we may know your presence in our midst
during this holy season of joy
as we anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Unexpected God,
your advent alarms us.
Wake us from drowsy worship,
from the sleep that neglects love,
and the sedative of misdirected frenzy.
Awaken us now to your coming,
and bend our angers into your peace. Amen.

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Almighty God, as your kingdom dawns, turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness, that we may be ready to meet you in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. *Common Worship Shorter Collect*

Lord our God, keep us your servants alert and watchful as we await the return of Christ your Son, so that when he comes and knocks at the door he may find us vigilant in prayer, with songs of praise on our lips. *Methodist Worship*

Lord our God, keep us your servants alert and watchful as we await the return of Christ your Son, so that when he comes and knocks at the door he may find us vigilant in prayer, with songs of praise on our lips. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

God of all hope and joy, open our hearts in welcome that your Son Jesus Christ at his coming may find in us a dwelling prepared for himself; Amen. *(New Zealand Prayer book)*

Come Lord Jesus, come as King. Rule in our hearts, come as love. Rule in our minds, come as peace. Rule our actions, come as power. Rule in our days, come as joy. Rule in our darkness, come as light. Rule in our bodies, come as health. Rule in our labours, come as hope. Thy Kingdom come among us. *(David Adam)*

Our heavenly Father, as we once again prepare for Christmas, help us to find time in our busy lives for quiet and thought and prayer, that we may reflect upon the wonder of your love. Allow the story of the Saviour's birth to deepen our joy, make our worship more real and our lives more worthy of all you have done for us through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *(Frank Colquhon)*

Lord, may we love all your creation, all the earth and every grain of sand in it. May we love every leaf, every ray of your light. For we acknowledge to you that all is like an ocean, all is flowing and blending, and that to withhold any measure of love from anything in your universe is to withhold that same measure of love from you. *Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-81)*

My heart is cold today, O God, I feel no burning desire no zeal to pray or to be with you. My heart is frozen by the chill of emptiness— sluggish and stalled. send forth your Spirit to revive my heart. Spark it with a relish for service, with a longing to pray. And may my desire to be your flame of warmth and love spark other stalled souls to come alive, aflame in you. *Edward Hays*

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O God, animate us to cheerfulness. may we have a joyful sense of our blessings, learn to look on the bright circumstances of our lot, and maintain a perpetual contentedness under thy allotments. Fortify our minds against disappointments and calamity. Preserve us from despondency, from yielding to dejection. Teach us that no evil is intolerable but a guilty conscience, and that nothing can hurt us, if with true loyalty of affection, we keep thy commandments and take refuge in thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *William Ellery Channing 1780-1842*

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, these gifts we offer are our response to the light which came into the world that first Christmas. Help us in this Advent season to allow that light to shine through us, so that the dark areas of people's lives life can be pierced by Christ's love. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

BENEDICTION

Go into this week,
filled with the peace of God,
nourished by the life of Jesus Christ
stimulated by the insight of the Holy Spirit

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Isaiah 2:1-5

The great vision of Isaiah paints a vivid imagery of what Jerusalem would be: a place of refuge where nations flock and learn the truth. Undoubtedly, the passage is an articulation of Isaiah's hope for peace in the midst of tumultuous times. One day, people would know the sovereignty of God and as a response they would go to Zion the sanctuary of the faith where the absolute trust in God will heal all relationships marred by mutual distrust and fear. According to Isaiah, God will be at the center of the movement towards lasting peace. The instruments of destruction will be the very means of construction, and there the unconquerable conviction of people towards a world free of war and suffering will finally find its fruition.

It is admittedly an idealistic vision, and some who take pride in their realism will surely question it. Yet one of the indisputable responsibilities of Christians is to work for peace. Christians should be part of the solution in resolving conflicts, and the first ones to pursue peace in strained personal or corporate situations. By doing so, we take part in the good work of building the kingdom of God in our present circumstances.

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- Is it possible to have peace among nations and individuals without God?
- What current issues in the world today challenge the fragile peace among peoples?
- How have you been an agent for peace in your own community?

Psalm 122

The psalmist begins with the words, "I was glad when they said to me, 'let us go to the house of the Lord.'" The happy tone of the psalm is understandable for the Israelites embark on an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The moment that their "feet are standing within the gates" of the holy land, they feel exuberant and joyful. Such is the love they have for the city that they pronounce peace, unity, solace, and prosperity within its blessed walls.

In our context, the church symbolizes the new Jerusalem; a city acting as light in darkness, inviting all to feel the presence of God in the midst where truth is found and all are assembled for the sole purpose of praising God.

- When hearing an invitation to go to church, do you feel the same anticipation expressed in the psalm?
- Do you always pray the same things as the psalmist did for the church?
- How have you been empowered by your involvement in the church?

Romans 13:11-14

St. Augustine was walking in a garden oblivious of the beauty around him for his heart was in turmoil. He felt miserable for he consistently fails to live the good and moral life he desperately longs for. Then a still child-like voice ushered him to "Take and read." He grabbed a copy of one of Paul's writings and his eyes rested upon the words: "Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." He did not need to read further. A calm assurance unlike anything he ever felt before unraveled his heart and caused him to believe.

The conversion story of St. Augustine is a good starting point to understand how even a difficult passage which sets a standard of morality can settle in a person. Though there are some people who insist on the verbal acceptance

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of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as the basis and finality of conversion, several passages in the bible like this one beg to disagree.

Discipleship is a process of becoming. It is an act of conforming ourselves to be Christ-like through the Holy Spirit. The willful response to the call to be holy is the natural consequence of faith, an expression of love, and the evidence of it. A personal transformation should be seen. So to carry the cross in our daily lives means striving to “lay aside” every deed that is contrary to the character of Christ, and to put on the “armor of light”, that is to put our utmost effort to protect ourselves from being drawn into the false cloak of darkness, thriving in excessive indulgence and all forms of depravity.

- Just as Augustine was inspired to follow Christ after reading this passage in Paul’s letter to the Romans, have you had a similar experience when reading the Scriptures?
- Since being a Christian bids you to gradually become Christ-like everyday, what personal challenges or inner conflicts have you encountered in the process?

Matthew 24:37-44

The act of vigilant waiting for the unexpected manner of Christ’s coming has been re-echoed throughout the New Testament writings. However, this particular passage in Matthew’s gospel is unique in its comparison of the Day of the Lord as similar to the narrative of Noah and the flood.

One can imagine that Jesus’ return would bring shock and desperation among the people like the inhabitants of the earth during the time of Noah, since he built the ark in clear and cloudless days enduring the mockery of his neighbors. Thus, the emphasis of the dominant theme in this particular passage: being vigilant in the faith; to hold fast to the end without wavering.

- Christians live in the present without losing our sense of eternity, how do you stay vigilant in the faith?
- Is vigilance more difficult in our society, which is focused more on individualism and consumerism?

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

The season of Advent came into being toward the middle of the sixth century. At first, the Advent Season was determined as the six Sundays leading up to Christmas. This was then reduced to four Sundays by Pope St. Gregory the

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Great (591-604). So now Advent is the season four weeks before Christmas in which we prepare for the coming of Christ and it begins on Sunday nearest to 30th November. Advent is the period of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus and its name comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "coming".

The season also celebrates Christ's anticipated coming again in the fullness of time to rule triumphantly over life in heaven and earth, so it is so much more than just a time to get ready for Christmas. The colour of Advent, seen in the candles used in the wreath is purple. Purple is used in the church at Lent, because it is the colour of saying sorry, it is also the colour used for funerals to show mourning. Purple is used at Advent not in a mournful way, or to say sorry, rather it is to demonstrate that something serious is taking place, Advent purple encourages us to engage in a time of reflective watchfulness. At Advent the Church is put on guard, to watch, be vigilant and prepared, but this is a time of reassurance, because it reminds us that the question is not whether Jesus will return to judge the earth, but when.

God's first intervention within our history came not in the form of some instant or earth shattering event, but instead God chose to come into the world as we all do, to be born as a baby in the midst of a chaotic world. By our own impatient standards this seems such a slow way to bring salvation to the world. But God may not always choose the easy answer or the quick fix. But by His earthly incarnation He demonstrates a total commitment to the very core of humanity. A commitment, to its day by day routines and challenges, a commitment to humanity from the cradle to the grave and beyond. And in that same incarnational way, God comes to us day by day, through the working of the Spirit, through His Word and Sacrament, making the ordinary extraordinary; making the broken whole; and redeeming and restoring the past, present and future, whatever they hold.

We should not spend our time worrying about the timing of God's arrival or about the distraction of what might happen in the meantime. God's reign has already broken into our world through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. His Kingdom is near and it is coming, even as it is already arrived but not fully realized. We are to remain watchful, and aware, and to be prepared for the final coming, which might arrive at any time.

In the birth of Jesus God's love is shared with uncommon grace in a world so desperately in need of that love. It is through us, and through the very imperfect Church that bears his name that his love and grace continue to come and be spread.

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There is much about Advent to enjoy, the Advent wreaths found in our churches where they have four candles to be lit each Sunday and one for Christmas Day. But in the midst of our church we know that just as we prepare for Christmas, so we have to make ready to welcome Jesus in our lives. As Christians there is a real sense that we live all year round in Advent time. We are living in the present but trying very hard to bring to the present the realities of the future. Our lives should be characterised by the lifestyle of heaven, even though we are currently inhabitants of planet earth. It is difficult to know how to interpret the standards of Jesus for our society. How do we 'turn the other cheek' in a society in which people are brutally murdered on our streets. Yet Advent tells us that we Christians are to do just that, bring God's reign in our own lives in such a way that we are salt in this sorry society and bring about change which makes a real difference. We must not become fatigued, we prepare inwardly and spiritually, but if that means anything it is demonstrated visibly in our changed lives. Somebody said "Nothing is more powerful than an individual acting out of conscience, thus helping to bring the collective conscience to life." This Advent we are challenged not to blame others, but instead to recognise that the change must come from us as we live the new lives of the Kingdom. Are you ready for the coming of Jesus?

Charles Royden

LECTIONARY NOTES 3

A new Kingdom

Isaiah 2:1 – 5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11 – 14; Matthew 24: 36 – 44

The New Testament writers held the beliefs that God was king and that his kingdom would one day be established on Earth. Neither of these beliefs was new or particularly startling. What they were really excited about was the conviction that this new kingdom had already begun to dawn, and that God was now entering into human history. Not surprisingly, they believed that this would make a radical difference to the way that things were. The whole point of what they were saying was not the reality of God's kingly rule, but the immediacy of it.

The Old Testament prophets had prepared the ground for such convictions. The Old Testament passage from Isaiah asserts the belief of what God will do 'in days to come', after the nation of Israel had been able to return to her own lands after the exile in Babylon. But the role of prophecy is complex: we easily use the term to predict the future but it is also important to remember that the prophet speaks God's words: it is not so much fore-telling, as forth-

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telling. What is also important is that the prophecies are recorded in texts so that they have an effect upon the life and faith of contemporary readers, and do not simply record what took place in the past.

Psalm 122 ties in with this same idea, and was a psalm sung by pilgrims as they approached Jerusalem. Apparently, for those who have visited and looked at Jerusalem, with this psalm in mind, it is very hard not to become moved at the beauty of the place which seems to be at the theological centre of the world. Anyone who thinks such thoughts today is definitely at the end of a long line of predecessors who 'pray for the peace of Jerusalem'.

From the believing in the coming of God, and feelings of wonder at the sight of the 'holy City'; we next consider Paul's passage in Romans which focuses his expectation of seeing Jesus. This is the famous passage which is reputed to have brought about the conversion of St Augustine of Hippo, 'not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.' This is the summons to a life lived in the context of the eternal future offered to all people and known now by those who respond in faith to the Jesus Christ.

Matthew 24 provides us with one of the basic texts for this complex of beliefs. Here is Jesus, towards the end of his life, warning his disciples that the end is to come imminently, and that the events which accompany its coming will be spectacular. The imagery is stark, deriving, as it does from the apocalyptic tradition which provided the context for the preaching of Jesus. In a world where the actual beginning and end of history are matters of scientific exploration rather than theological dogma, we need to read through the words of Jesus to penetrate their essentials. Stripped down to these, the message is that at any moment might reveal the glorious presence of the God who is Father of Jesus Christ.

What hope is there for the world? Can we look forward to anything, or are we condemned either to seeing things getting steadily worse or to an endless circularity of improvement and decline? The answer from the Christian tradition has always been that hope can only truly be fixed in God. The proper response to God is one of goodness, kindness, and compassion to our neighbour, such as God shows us. These qualities can reveal the Christ who is gloriously present in our neighbour.

Peter

Littleford

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SERMON OUTLINE

Matt 24:36-44 about that day and hour...

Picture the setting - Jesus was *sitting on the Mount of Olives* - questioned by the disciples about *the sign of his coming & the end of the age (Mt 24.3) >> about that day & hour (36)*

1. A Day of Surprise: *no one knows - only the Father - not even the Son!*

Jesus urges watchfulness - *keep awake (42) for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming*. It will be unexpected - like *a thief in the night*. He then refers them to *the days of Noah (37)* - times of evil, immorality & sin...

a) Waywardness - *eating, drinking, marrying, self-centredness* - no thought of God or eternity - heaven or hell..

b) Wickedness - **Gen 6.11** *the earth was corrupt in God's sight & full of violence* - resulting in the flood/purging of evil

2. A Day of Separation: - cf parables of the sheep/goats - net full of fish - *2 will be in the field (40) 1 will be taken & 1 will be left; 2 women will be grinding meal together* - taken to blessing or judgement – cf v13 *he who stands firm to the end will be saved* - may we all be given strength to stand firm through a deep & living faith in X!!

3. A Day of Sorrow: for those who are not ready - caught unawares/ unprepared - like *the owner of the house* - burgled during the *night* - & great was his loss! Exclusion from heaven will bring *weeping & gnashing of teeth* - a dire & dreadful penalty! *Therefore you also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour* - no one knows when - readiness for that coming is the only remedy!!

This is one of the keynote messages of Advent - may we all live a life of readiness for that Coming which we proclaim in our historic Creeds - the heart of our Faith!

Norman Porteous

SERMON - Be Awake and Ready – Advent 1 (A)

[\[RCL\]: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44](#)

The hippopotamus is an awfully deadly animal. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica hippos are the sixth most deadly mammal to humans on the planet. Hippos follow elephants, horses, deer, tigers, and of course, other humans as the most dangerous mammals to human beings. Most of us, I suppose, think of hippos as cute and cuddly, serene, floating in the waters of

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Africa. Those who have been on or near those waters know that the hippopotamus is an extraordinarily aggressive and territorial animal that is very prone to attack.

There is an amazing athlete named Juliet Starrett. She is a two-time extreme whitewater canoe champion, she is also a lawyer and a survivor of cancer. A few years ago Juliet was canoeing through the Zambezi River in Eastern Africa. It was on that trip that her canoe was disturbed by a hippopotamus. Not so much disturbed as exploded. The way that Juliet tells it, she was paddling along one second and the next she was ten feet in the air above the water. She says that she looked down and saw the chomping jaws of the hippo turning her performance canoe into splinters. While in the air, Juliet says that she spotted the nearest shore and began swimming – *while in the air!* She was swimming in mid-air!

That kind of thinking while in the midst of a disorienting and dangerous tragedy, that cool appraisal of the situation and the prioritization of survival, that kind of thinking demonstrates what is sometimes called the “ready-state.” Ready-state is a notion of health in any particular situation or system. A good ready-state in an immune system for example would be the ability to bounce back from an illness quickly and completely. Ready-state can also be used to describe relationships. Ready-state relationships are healthy and resilient.

In a person, a ready-state is characterized by the ability of that person to enter into just about any situation with equanimity and openness. Fragility, on the other hand, is the opposite of ready-state. Ready-state is not about being anxious and hyper-vigilant, but is instead about mindfulness and well... readiness.

Most of all ready-state is due mostly to advance-work, namely: training. Consistent, intentional training, over time, allows for the ready-state. Juliet, the canoer on the Zambezi, was not expecting or planning for the hippo attack, instead she was simply trained and ready; and when the time came, her training and general ready-state kicked in.

In today’s gospel passage, Jesus is reminding us that not even he, nor the angels, know when God will come. Some like to think that God will come in terrible retribution with flames and violence. These people look for signs in international politics and weather patterns that God is coming to judge and destroy the world. This is the Day of the Lord, the great apocalyptic coming of God to be with the creation fully. The reason that so many doom-sayers with signs that say, “The End is Nigh,” say what they say is because the prophets and gospel writers, even Jesus, used language like this: great tribulation, division, floods of fire and water.

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The point they are trying to make is that when God comes to be fully wedded to creation, the existing order of things will be reversed. Instead of violence and oppression being used to secure economic and political flourishing for some, the Kingdom of God will be established so that peace and justice will walk hand-in-hand.

These reversals of the worldly ordering of life is a trademark of God's presence and it always comes as a surprise because that kind of life, one marked with peace, justice, presence and love can be achieved in the here and now.

And Jesus, in today's reading, is calling us to be awake and prepared for it. Jesus is reminding us of the importance to be in a ready-state for God's coming. This is part of what Advent is all about. Advent, it turns out is not, *is not*, a countdown of shopping days until Christmas but a reminder of the ready-state, a call to training our spirits for God's arrival.

The Christian tradition recognizes that God has come, and will come, to be with us in three distinct ways.

The first coming of God was when God walked with us in Jesus of Nazareth. We will celebrate that coming in a few weeks at the Feast of the Incarnation, otherwise known as Christmas.

Another coming of God is the final coming which Jesus makes mention of in today's reading, when God and creation will be as they were meant to be, fully united. The strongest image the Bible has for this union is a marriage between God and creation and, make no mistake, heaven is coming to Earth (Rev. 21).

The third coming of God happens between the first coming and the final coming of God, between the coming of Jesus and the final marriage of God and creation. This coming of God is the daily visitation: God with us in our prayers, finding God in our neighbors, seeing God in those we are privileged to serve.

What we see in these three visitations is that all of them are the hoped for Day of the Lord. Each of these visitations carries with it the reversals of the normal, worldly order but also the loving and just presence of God.

How are you in a ready-state for God's coming? How then can we be awake and watchful for the coming of God, whether in the final coming of the daily visitation of God?

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There is a telling portion of Scripture that happens when the disciples have just seen Jesus ascend into Heaven. The disciples are looking up, dumbfounded. Finally, some angels appear and ask, "Why are you looking up, trying to find him?" The implication is, "Don't look up to find Jesus, look out, look in."

Jesus is always one step ahead, going into the city, into Galilee, into life, we are meant to seek and find him there. That's how we stay ready for God's coming, we daily, hourly stay on the lookout for God, not in the clouds, not in the powerful events of the world, but in the quiet, domestic ways that God visits us. God may indeed someday come in the clouds but it more than likely will come in your life.

Advent is a reminder of the ready-state, be awake and ready for God. This is why Advent tends to be described as preparatory, not just for the great celebration of Christmas but for the final coming of God and also for the ever-present daily visit of God with us in the here and now.

God is not as deadly as the hippo, but God is as disruptive to our normal hard-hearted ways as the hippo was to the canoer on the Zambezi. Be ready, be awake because the love of God will disrupt, explode and turn over our comfortable notions of how things ought to be. God will launch us into the air and into the waters of justice, peace, presence and love. It can be disorienting, but if we have trained ourselves to be ready, then we might work with God to establish God's Kingdom more deeply in our hurting world.

Let us pray: Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

A WORD FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Prop - a torch.

Invite everyone to look at the candle - note how our eyes are drawn to the light.

Just one tiny flame can make the atmosphere brighter round about it. It's similar when we switch a torch on - ask the children/young people if they like playing with torches - the answer most likely to be in the affirmative - why do they like it? Are they interested in what colour or shape the torch is? No, it is the light that fascinates - and it's fun to direct the torch's beam on

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all sorts of areas we might not be able to see clearly otherwise. (Direct the torch beam on the ceiling or other spots in the church)

A torch is handy when you have to see in a difficult- to- get- into- space- like under beds, under cars, behind refrigerators etc etc. It can be a bit like that in life as well - when people are unhappy for whatever reason - maybe sickness, or no work, or too much work, or there's quarrelling among your friends at school or arguments at home , we might feel that, on our own, we can't penetrate the unhappiness.

In the reading from the New Testament (Romans 13: 11-14) which we just heard, the writer, Paul, says that we are to put on "the armour of light". Armour made people strong enough to withstand attacks by the enemy. Our 'enemy' sometimes is the temptation to do wrong things, or the temptation to do nothing when someone needs our help. When we put on "the armour of light" we are switching on Jesus' power within us so that we can bring that smile or hug, that helping act which brightens a person's life just when they needed it. So, its very necessary to keep our lives connected to Jesus so that he can use us to brighten someone's day.

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

See also the CNI Parish Support Pack for Advent.

"Later Days," the Rev. Dr. Ted A. Smith, *Day 1*, Advent rings true. Because we know what it means to dwell in lowly exile here, we can sing with integrity when we sing, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Because we know war, and rumours of war, and the endless background noise of almost-war, we are ready to sing, "dear desire of every nation, enter every trembling heart." Because we are a people who live in deep darkness, we know how to long to see a great light. Advent is a season of anticipating the coming of Christ. It is a season that gives voice to our yearning. And because we yearn, we can live into the season. Advent just rings true.

http://day1.org/5368-later_days

"Why Advent Is the Hardest of Times for Faithful Christians," Catherine A. Caimano, Duke Divinity School's *Faith & Leadership*

<http://www.faithandleadership.com/sermons/why-advent-the-hardest-times-for-faithful-christians>

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"Closer Than You Think," the Rev. Dr. Stephen Montgomery, *Day 1*
http://day1.org/2384-closer_than_you_think

"Waiting," Dr. P.C. Enniss, *Day 1*
http://day1.org/368-the_rev_dr_pc_enniss

"The Waiting Place," the Rev. Dr. William L. Self, *Day 1*
http://day1.org/619-the_waiting_place

CHILDREN

Worshiping with Children, Advent 1A, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown
<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/year-first-sunday-of-advent-also-sunday.html>

"Birthday Candles," video, John Stevens, *Dollar Store Children's Sermons*
<http://dskidsermons.wordpress.com/2013/11/07/birthdaycandles/>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

1st Reading Isaiah 58: 1–9a

647* Guide me, O thou great Jehovah
125* Hail to the Lord's anointed
535* Judge eternal, throned in splendour
712* Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
497 The Church of Christ in every age
510 We pray for peace

Psalms 112: 1–9 (10)

591* O happy day that fixed my choice

2nd Reading 1 Corinthians 2: 1–12 (13–16)

11* Can we by searching find out God
567* Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go
220* [Glory be to Jesus]
232 Nature with open volume stands
594* O Lord of creation, to you be all praise
248* We sing the praise of him who died
247* [When I survey the wondrous cross]

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The Gospel Matthew 5: 13–20

86 Christ is the King! O friends, rejoice
381* God has spoken – by his prophets
324* God, whose almighty word
382* Help us, O Lord, to learn
589 Lord, speak to me that I may speak
503* Make me a channel of your peace
526 Risen Lord, whose name we cherish

Please commend this resource to colleagues - they simply send an email to churchnewsireland@gmail.com with the message Passwords in the title

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