

Title: “Stillness of Advent”

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Isaiah 9:6-7
Mark 15:42-47

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Overview:

Advent is a time of waiting, a time of anticipation for the return of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Lesson:

Advent is all about waiting. Not for the coming of baby Jesus, but for the return of Christ our King.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

If you haven't been with us the past two Wednesday evenings, you might be thinking that we have our holidays confused. “That guy up there is new and still learning so we should cut him some slack, but where's his mentor? Doesn't he know the difference between Advent and Lent?” But if you have been with us you know that we have spent this time leaning into the stillness of the cross through these unexpected passages. We have been recounting the suffering and death of Christ but through the lens of Christmas and the infant Christ. We have been making our way to the manger but at the same time also traveling to the cross because, although we may want to journey to Bethlehem, Golgotha is where we really should be destined.

The first week we looked at the compassion that Christ had for those who judged, condemned, and crucified him. Although he could have saved himself, he saved us instead. Last week we looked at the control that Christ exhibited throughout the trials and suffering that he experienced. Upon that cross and out of our sight was a battle that was being waged and a war that was being won. And every second of that activity was under the complete control of Jesus. This week we wrap up the series with a discussion of Advent itself. “Here we go again.” You are probably saying. “Now we get a lesson on what Advent is. Does he know that I'm much older than he is? That I've gone through more of these seasons than he has?” Yes. Yes, I know that. And I ask for your patience. I am not going to stand up here and tell you that the word itself means the arrival of something notable and that it's odd to use it in reference to the period of time *before* Christ's birth. I'm also not going to tell you that Advent is about the Church preparing itself for Christmas. Advent is much bigger than all of that. You see, Advent is all about waiting. Not for the coming of baby Jesus, but for the return of Christ our King. Baby Jesus has already come into this world. We celebrate that during Christmas, sure, but we do so while at the same time looking forward to his second coming.

You see, for us Christmas is a way to not only remember where we've been but also where we're going, but only if we stop and take the time to do so. Only if we also, become still. We can't look forward if we are looking down: at our calendars, at our shopping lists, and our party reservations. These are all good things, of course, but we need to take a moment to stop and look out. We need to look at the landscape of Christ and see what is behind us and what is ahead of us; what we are celebrating and what we are looking forward to. And we need to do this as individuals, as Christians, and as God's Church. Here's what I mean. As a church, we've *been* preparing for Christmas, but we are *heading* towards Easter and then beyond. As Christians, we've *been* in separation from our Father but because of Christ we are *heading* towards reuniting with him

for all eternity. For ourselves, we have *been* born into sin but are *heading* towards a future free from all sin and separation from God.

This is what Christmas and Advent is all about and this is why we need the stillness of the season. And I urge you, if you have not already been doing so, to take time this week to sit and contemplate the compassion and the control of Christ our Lord.

Tonight, I'd like to spend a few minutes of silence so that we, as a church, can experience the stillness of Advent. Can you see yourself at the side of the manger, looking down into the face of baby Jesus? Can you see the peace that he brings to you? From where you stand, right there at his feet, you have a view from the moment of creation all the way forward to the return of Christ our Lord. Now look up and see, beyond the cradle, beyond the empty tomb, to a future where you see God face to face.

I will now take my seat and ask that we spend the next few minutes in meditation. After that we'll sing about the anticipated return of Christ our King.

(Silence. Then sing "O come, O come, Emmanuel")