

First Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 63:16b-17; 64:1-8

It's hard for someone born into the church and who is a life-long Christian to really understand the prayer of someone who has truly lost sight of God. We may even question how they could have lost sight of God. How could one who once belonged to God so totally lose the peace of His presence?

It might be easier to understand if we think of a toddler out shopping with Mom. Have you ever witnessed the total panic that a little one experiences when they realize that Mom has disappeared? The toddler has been merrily exploring and wandering until they realize that they have left Mom's side. They may not have even realized that they were getting further and further away, until it was too late. It was that way with God's people in the Old Testament, though their wanderings were far more rebellious than even the average toddler.

The toddler and the wandering believer have other things in common, too. Like Mom, God is never far away. Like the toddler, the wandering believer runs from aisle to aisle in a panic, while God pursues them and finally blocks the way so that He is the only thing visible to the fearful. Like the toddler, God's wandering child finally runs into the arms of the One Who can make it all better.

The last comparison of our traveling children is repentance. Isaiah writes the prayer of the one who understands that they have become lost and who understands that it was they who left God, not the other way around. The toddler may think that it's a wonderful game to run from Mom and be independent, until Mom is out of sight. Then they realize that the world isn't so much fun when you're there all alone without the One who loves you the most and who gently guides you.

And, like Mom, God never fails to love and to forgive. Even rebellious toddlers receive undeserved love from Mom. Even Jerusalem received the ultimate undeserved love of the coming of the Messiah, God's own Son.

As we enter Advent, have you decided to share Christ with others?

A message from your District Education Committee



First Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 63:16b-17; 64:1-8

1. Advent is the time of "coming." Find all of the "come" verbs in this text. What coming was Isaiah's audience anticipating?
2. Advent celebrates the coming of the Savior. The need for a Messiah is clear in verse 6. How does this verse describe our condition?
3. How does the thought of God's final coming bring fear (vs. 2,3,5)?
4. What is the significance of the divine names of 63:16?
5. The prophet prays that God would come (64:1). In what situations have you prayed that God would come for you?
6. It's Advent and we prepare for the celebration of our Savior's coming. How will you more intentionally prepare your heart for the celebration of our Savior's birth? What family activities might direct your spiritual focus?



First Sunday of Advent

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Jeremiah wrote the phrase “The days are coming” sixteen times. Seven times he referred to the coming judgment of God’s people, but nine times he referred to God’s restoration of His people. God’s restoration promise in these verses refers to Christ, but when in time?

Jeremiah’s description surely describes Jesus’ first coming to our world, but He was rejected, and Jerusalem did not see peace in the complete sense at His first coming. In fact the city was destroyed and her people scattered again less than forty years after the Resurrection. It is at Jesus’ second coming all that the prophets proclaimed will come to pass completely. Jeremiah’s words apply to two events.



Jeremiah did not know when Jesus was coming the first time, let alone the second, but he did know that God would save His people and restore them to Himself and to a peace beyond their comprehension. How He would accomplish that was in the hands of the Lord himself. A savior would come, but Jeremiah’s listeners would know little else.

In our time Advent is the season preceding our celebration of Jesus’ birth, but also a season of preparation for His second coming when He will take us into His presence forever. We know and celebrate the story of Jesus’ first coming as an infant who lived and died so that we might better understand God and be reunited with Him. We, like Jeremiah, celebrate Jesus’ second coming only as a promise of God. We can be assured that for us the coming will be wonderful. We do not need to fear it, nor do we need to establish exactly when it will come. Our human nature wants to get it all down in detail because we really hate surprises and we really hate not being in control—even of God. But we strive to remember God’s Word through Jeremiah, “In those days and at that time ***I will..***” Our only task is to witness Christ’s love and wait with anticipation.

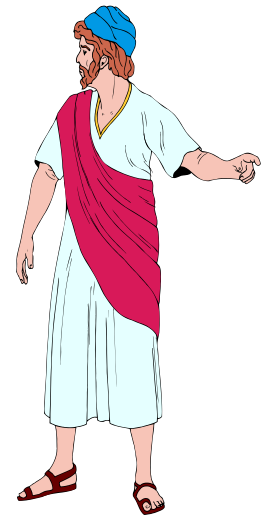
Renew your walk with Christ through a Bible study this week!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

First Sunday of Advent

Jeremiah 33:14-16

1. Verses 15-16 are repeated from Jeremiah 23:5-6. Why do you suppose prophet Jeremiah repeats those words?
2. What “day” (vs. 15,16) is Jeremiah writing about? Has the “day” come?
3. What is the significance of the title of righteous “Branch”? (Isaiah 4:2)
4. How would the Messiah King be different from King David and his descendants?
5. What is the significance of the title “The Lord Our Righteousness”? (Romans 3:21-22; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
6. It’s the Advent season. A new church year has begun. What new beginnings in worship, Bible study, or service will you be making?



First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah tells us much about the “last days”. That is when Jesus will return in glory—His second advent. First He came as Savior, then He will come as Judge.

I once knew a lady who became very disgruntled with God as she got older and it became more and more apparent that Jesus was not going to return before her departure from this life. We shouldn’t think critically of her, though. From St. Paul’s writings it is pretty clear that he also thought that Jesus would return before his death. What does this mean—is Jesus not going to return after all? No, it just means that the right time has not yet come. Jesus told the apostles that in His human nature even He did not know the exact hour of His second appearance, but He also assured them that it would come! As the history of our world hurries along its way, it becomes a little clearer each decade that we are getting closer to the last days.

In our lesson today Isaiah talks little about the judgment to come. His message concentrates on the spiritual unity that will flourish when Jesus returns. Peace will at last cover the planet and many nations will stream to the mountain of Jerusalem to see the Lord and hear His word. That picture was a wonderful encouragement for the Jews of Isaiah’s time who were about to be exiled as punishment for their disobedience. It is a wonderful encouragement for us too. We will be there to see Jesus no matter what year He comes.

Isaiah’s final words in this passage tell us what we are to do while we wait for the Lord. He says, “*Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.*” (verse 5) In response to the hope of the coming time of peace and glory, Isaiah prayed that his rebellious countrymen would flee from sin and back into God’s arms. Though we are safe in God’s arms, we also must “walk in the light of the Lord.” He has much for us to do before His return.

Learn more about Jesus’ first coming and second coming in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2:1-5

1. It’s Advent! “Advent” means “to come.” How is this theme expressed in this text by prophet Isaiah?
2. Isaiah takes us to the mountains. Where is the “mountain of the Lord”? From your own experience what is it like to go to the mountains? What is it like to go to the “mountain of the Lord”?
3. What message is given by the pictures “swords into plowshares” and “spears into pruning hooks”? What do these pictures have to do with the Messiah?
4. Advent is also a season of light. What invitation comes to us in vs. 7? Who is The Light of the season?
5. Our Old Testament lessons for the Advent season will come from the book of Isaiah. Who is this “son of Amoz” (vs. 1)? When did he prophecy? How did God call him (see Isaiah 6:1-8)?
6. How will the light of Advent shine in your home? How can this be a special time of preparation for your family?

First Sunday in Advent

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

It isn't January yet, but today we celebrate the beginning of a new year—a new church year. Advent, when we look forward to Christ's return, and celebrate His birth among us, begins a new time of dedication and renewal. Just as we often anticipate January 1st as a day on which we begin new efforts to fulfill goals that we have set for ourselves, we may want to consider how we may grow in our faith and in our relationship with our Lord as the new church year begins. As we set new goals of growth in our faith, we remember with joy Paul's words to the Corinthians, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (vs.3)

As we set out to become better witnesses, better parents, better children, better bosses, better spouses, better servants, etc., we won't have an easy time of it. Temptations will bloom in our lives and we will not resist them all. We will have mountaintop experiences and valley lows. Through it all we will grow to be more like Jesus and we will grow stronger in our faith, because He will grant us grace and peace.

Paul's words about grace and peace express the truth of God's relationship and faithfulness to us. Because of Jesus and His death in our place, God gives us peace and He gives us grace, whether in a mountaintop day or a valley day. His forgiveness of our weakness never fails and He constantly lifts us up, strengthens us, and even walks with us as He helps us set those goals and work for them.

What are your goals this new year? Jesus' birth is on our hearts; anticipating His return is in our minds; His reality is constantly with us. What goal is there that we could set that He cannot enable us to do? The Corinthians were far from perfect people, as are we, yet Paul knew that God's love would get them past their problems and restore their growth. God can and will do the same for us. In Him, we too are enriched in every way.

Learn more about heaven in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

First Sunday in Advent

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

1. How many times do we find the name of Jesus in these verses?
Who was foremost in St. Paul's thoughts, writings, and speaking?
2. In what ways were the Corinthians Christians rich? (vs. 5, 7)
3. Advent focuses on three aspects of "coming"—Christ first coming at Christmas, His coming to our hearts, and His coming again on the Last Day. Which "coming" does St. Paul write about in these verses?
4. What attribute (characteristic) of God is found in vs. 9? What blessing is this attribute to us?

For Family Reflection

5. What riches in Christ are found in your family? How is it especially helpful to remember those riches at this time of the year?
6. It a new (church) year! How can Jesus be a more important part of the Advent season and the year in your home?

First Sunday of Advent

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Paul was very good at building thought upon thought until reaching an undeniable conclusion. That's why many passages begin with "therefore," or "for." These words demand that we go back in our reading to where Paul began his thought. Today's passage, for instance, builds on the first word of Chapter Three, which is "therefore." Backing up in our reading, we see "for" at the beginning of Chapter Two. Finally, in the early words of his letter, we see Paul's thoughts begin. In today's verses he is concluding that introductory thought. His joy in this letter, regardless of additional purposes, has much to do with our celebration of Advent.

Paul had feared that the Thessalonian church might believe the lying rumors that he was a charlatan, but he had heard from Timothy the great news that the church remained strong in their commitment to God and in their trust of Paul. They remained imitators of their mentor and worked hard to share the love of Christ in their actions and words. Therefore he wrote, *"For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?"* (2:19) Paul didn't think that he had saved the Thessalonians, but he knew that his witness to them had been an instrument of God. They would be his pride, in a good way, when they stood at his side at Jesus' return.

Paul believed that Jesus' return was imminent. What was his most important instruction to the saints as they awaited the world changing event? Love! Love wipes out hatred and contention in the church and spreads the gospel in the world. Stop and think—how hard is it to be angry or self-centered when we are consumed with Jesus' love for our fellow Christians? How can we resist sharing Jesus when we love those who don't know Him? Love inspires our joy and our actions.

Paul's instruction to love while we wait is simple, but not easy. It requires our prayer and commitment. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to work out a lifestyle shift, but what an exciting and joyful way to spend the time remaining until we see Jesus!

Learn more about Jesus' first coming and second coming in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

First Sunday of Advent

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

1. Read the previous verses (vs. 6-8). What report from Timothy brought Paul's commendations in our text?
2. We have begun the Advent season. How does Paul model that Advent is a time for prayer?
3. Advent focuses on the return of Christ. What should be our condition (vs. 13) as we anticipate His return?
4. With faith in Jesus do we "lack" (vs. 10) any of God's gifts to us? What may have been lacking in the faith of the Thessalonians? What is lacking in our faith response?

For Family Reflection

5. Advent is a time to show Jesus' love to others (vs. 12). Think of some special expressions of love in the home and beyond.
6. Advent is also a time of joy. What special joys do you and your family note this season?

First Sunday in Advent

Matthew 21:1-11

It isn't January yet, but today we celebrate the beginning of a new year—a new church year. Advent, when we look forward to Christ's return and celebrate His birth among us, begins a new time of dedication and renewal. Just as we often anticipate January 1 as a day on which we begin new efforts to fulfill goals that we have set for ourselves, we may want to consider how we can grow in our faith and in our relationship with our Lord as the new church year begins.

As He approached Jerusalem two thousand years ago, looking over the city from the hill, Jesus quoted Isaiah, "Behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden." Their King had arrived, not on a mighty steed to claim rule, but on a donkey, a symbol used by those who wanted peace.

When Jesus returns to His world, it will not be on a donkey and He will not come in peace. He will return in the sky and all the world will see Him coming (Acts 1). He has come as Savior and King. He will come as Judge and King. How many people will welcome Him at His return is His challenge also to us.

What are your goals this new year? Jesus' birth is on our hearts; anticipating His return is in our minds; His reality is constantly with us. What goal is there that we could set that He cannot enable us to do? We can turn any problem that shades our life over to Him. He does have the answers to all that we may need or ask.

Knowing this, and knowing that He has promised that He will never leave us, never abandon us, and never ignore our prayers, can free us to think about others—the others who have no idea that Jesus really is the Son of God and Savior of the world. How can we share the Gospel with them? We approach the new year in January. We are already at a new year in the church. We can seek God's plan for our new year. We can ask God to enable us to live out our faith, to witness His reality to others by the way we live, the choices we make, the words that we say, even the movies that we watch. How can you live your love for Jesus next year?

Talk about living out God's grace in your life in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

First Sunday in Advent

Matthew 21:1-11

1. Advent focuses on "coming." Jesus was coming to _____ on _____ and the crowd shouted _____.
2. How, when and by whom had the coming of Jesus been prophesied (vs. 5)? What does the fulfillment of the prophecy say about the Old Testament prophets and their message?
3. For what other church year celebration is this text often used? Why is it also an appropriate Advent text?

For Family Reflection

4. Jesus comes humbly into Jerusalem. How do we see His humility in other times of His earthly journey? How can the Advent season be observed humbly in your home?
5. How are Jesus' coming as a baby and His coming to Jerusalem for His passion related?
6. The crowds welcomed Jesus with shouts of praise. How are you welcoming Jesus in your heart and to your home?

First Sunday in Advent

Mark 13:24-37

At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus' disciples enthusiastically point out to Him the grandeur and beauty of the magnificent temple that Herod the Great had begun years before. The huge complex was still under construction, and the disciples were overwhelmed at the growing worship center. Jesus calms their enthusiasm, however, by telling them that the great buildings would be completely destroyed. (This happened about forty years after the Resurrection.)

Some of the disciples questioned Jesus privately about the timing of this event. Jesus tells them, and us, about some of the many things that will happen before His return.

Jesus concludes His description with an admonishment to “keep on the alert.” He uses the term “alert” four times in this short passage. Is He trying to frighten His followers into being good? Was He afraid that if they were sinning at His return that they would have to go to hell? Some people seem to think so. They think that being caught in sin at the Last Day would cause instant damnation. My grandmother was caught up in this attitude during a particularly magnificent display of the Northern Lights (or Aurora Borealis) in central North Dakota many years ago. It seems that Granddad was down at the neighbors playing whist (a card game), and she greatly feared that Jesus was on His way back and would “catch” him. (Card playing—most likely for money—apparently being quite a sin in the Norwegian Synod at the time.) However, that interpretation of “keep on the alert” doesn't fit Scripture. It rejects God's grace that has covered His children's sinful nature with the blood of Jesus.

The state of being alert that Jesus refers to is not a warning to “stay saved,” but an admonishment that when the things Jesus describes begin to happen, there is little time left in which to gather more friends and loved ones into His kingdom. We are assured of Jesus' love, whether in the day of His return or the day of our departure from this life. Our task, as the time grows short, is to bring His love to more of the world around us.

Have you asked your friends to join you in worship?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

First Sunday in Advent

Mark 13:24-37

1. Jesus talks about “those days” (vs. 24), “at that time” (vs. 26), and “that day” (vs. 32). What event is He talking about? Why should His audience (and we) be concerned?
2. Who is the “Son of Man”? Read the commentary on Mark 8:31 in the Concordia Self-study Bible. What is the significance of this title?
3. When will Jesus return? (vs. 32). In what sense was the Son unaware of the last day? Since the time of the return is unknown, what is Jesus' warning?

For Family Reflection

4. When do parents or other adults tell children to “watch out!”? In what sense does Jesus tell us to “watch out!”?
5. What does the Bible tell us about angels? According to vs. 27, what will angels be doing when Jesus comes again?
6. Advent means “coming.” What “coming” is most of the world concerned about at this time of the year? What “coming” does this Bible reading tell us to be concerned about? Come, Lord Jesus!

First Sunday in Advent

Luke 19:28-40

“After Jesus had said this...” Jesus had just finished the story of the man who left each of his servants an amount of his money to care for. Two had done well, investing the money wisely and gaining a profit. The third had hidden away the money given him and had done nothing to increase it. The master’s anger burned against the man who had done nothing to invest his wealth.

As Jesus neared Jerusalem for the last time, the Pharisees were waiting. Hearing the crowd praising Jesus, they shouted to Him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” The Pharisees were offended because the people were jubilantly greeting Jesus as the “King coming in the name of the Lord.” Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees clearly states who He believed himself to be— “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

The Pharisees, the most influential of the Jewish leaders among God’s people, represented the servant of Jesus’ parable—they had hidden the truth from the people rather than reveal God’s true kingdom.

Entering Jerusalem and knowing that the people thought He would be a military/political conqueror, Jesus sent a message by riding in on a donkey. Kings who came in peace did this in ancient times. However, He also rode over palm branches strewn on the road, another symbol used at the time. This was the practice of not letting the hoof of a conquering king’s steed touch the bare ground.

As we enter Advent, the season in which we celebrate the return of Jesus as well as the coming celebration of His birth, do you believe what Jesus said? Will you welcome Him as the Son of God and Savior of the world? Our culture says that he was just a nice guy; a good teacher; a prophet; a human being who knew God’s will. As Jesus said to Peter, “Who do you say that I am?”

Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

First Sunday in Advent

Luke 19:28-40

1. Advent means “coming.” Into what city was Jesus coming? Why was He coming into the city? What other special event in the church year is connected with this text?
2. “Blessed is the King who _____ in the name of the Lord!” (vs. 38) Why were the people excited about Jesus coming? Did their excitement last? (see Luke 23:21-23)
3. How did Jesus come into Jerusalem? Why didn’t He come like the king they expected? What can we learn from Jesus’ entry?

For Family Reflection

4. Who or what is going to “rule” your Christmas preparation? Will it be all the activities of the season or will it be King Jesus? How will He be part of your heart and home?
5. Why are the stories of Jesus’ birth and Jesus’ death both important? Why would we have a story about Jesus last days begin our Advent study?
6. How could you tell that it was a new season in your church? What colors did you notice? Were there any other reminders in the church that we are preparing for the coming of Jesus? How can you make it a special season in your family?