

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

DECEMBER 3, 2023



ADVENT

it begins with change

by Drew Downs

Advent marks the beginning of the new liturgical year. It is rooted in tradition: with practices geared toward watching, anticipating, waiting, and hoping.

These themes and practices are predictable, returning each year to orient and remind us. They provoke and inspire us while mimicking the season we feel around us: the great anticipation of Christmas. This mirrors the anticipation we engage in through Advent.

The irony, of course, is that this is practice for change. To remember the transformation of the world through the Incarnate Word and the transformation that will come to us in his return. In short: this is a season of change.

And we begin the season with a rooted conviction that change is our work. To embody the transforming grace of God in our community by making community with others, full of singing, gift-giving, and joy.

ADVENT

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Practicing Advent

When I think of Advent, I'm reminded of traditional images: the advent wreaths, candles, and the music.

I think of the readings we get each year: apocalyptic opening, John the Baptizer, and the angel announcing the Messiah's birth.

And I think of how much we are driven toward spending money—even as we enjoy movies telling us that joy isn't for sale.

Now, in recent days, I also think about this in terms of conflict rather than revelation. Try as I might each year, we still think of this time as the Christmas Season. And my own obstinance, doesn't instill the hope at the heart of the Advent season. It makes me seem like the Grinch, whose heart predictably changes on Christmas Day.

What we do have, however, is something more akin to counterculture. And just like those things that mark countercultural movements, from sit-in and long hair to tattoos and punk rock, even to love of sci fi and comic books, what is lovingly practiced and enjoyed can become quite normal.

I invite us all to practice this season of anticipation, preparation, and hope with the grace and joy of something we actually like. Because it has something beautiful and courageous to teach us.

With love,
Drew

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FOR SUNDAY

Advent 1B

December 3, 2023

Collect

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 for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 13:24-37

Jesus said, "In those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.
Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

ADVENT

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Reflection

This passage is part of the section of Mark known as the Little Apocalypse. It is an uncharacteristically apocalyptic teaching from Jesus. And it comes right after leaving the Temple during his last week.

We get it at the start of Advent as a reminder of what we really are in the middle of: world-changing grace. And the fact of that grace is that God has different ideas about what is good from the world we live in. And this has been the case for well over two thousand years.

We need the reminder that we are struggling to save ourselves. In every single way. And it is that way for a reason—that we can't. We can't isolate ourselves to safety or spend our way to happiness. And we can't do it alone. It takes community. It takes God's grace.

And that promise, that God is with us, has already been fulfilled. And it will be yet fulfilled. It has happened and also will happen. We have grace and will receive grace. Because we have been freed and God will free us from what imprisons us. It is both at once and it is all of this. We must be persistent in faith.

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