

Happy New Year! Today, the First Sunday in Advent, is the start of a new liturgical year in the Church.

How would you like it if you woke up this morning and discovered that today was December 24<sup>th</sup>, the day before Christmas? You can't imagine the words that many of your parents might think or say if they woke up to discover that suddenly the next three to four weeks, pretty much the entire holiday season, had disappeared. But how would *you* feel? While some of you might like it because you are excited about Christmas, some of you might realize that you would never have had a chance to get ready or prepared for the holiday by buying presents, and decorating, and making cookies, and writing Christmas cards, which are all part of the preparation. Well, the Church has a preparation season that takes place at the same time as the holiday season, and it starts this weekend, the season of Advent. The Church thinks Advent is a special time. The music is a little different. The priest and the altar have purple vestments. And there is an Advent wreath. And Advent is the start of the new liturgical year for the church. So, Happy New Year! Not that that's an official Advent greeting, but it's why we started today's discussion with "Happy New Year."

So there's a word. *Advent*. Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means coming. And we know Christmas is coming. But on Christmas *who* is coming? No, Santa Claus is not the coming that the Church is waiting for during Advent. Rather, the Church is waiting for Jesus's coming. Through all the decorating and cookie making, it is *His* coming that we have to prepare for.

Now let's suppose you were told that today you will have a fire in your kitchen. What would you and your parents do? You would make sure that anything which was a risk of fire such as towels near the oven, metal in the microwave, etc. was all removed from the kitchen. Because you would want to take special care to avoid the risks of fire

today. Now let's put down all of our electronic devices and do something really different. Let's go outside to play. But suppose you were told that the next time you play outside, you were going to fall and hurt yourself. What would you do? Well, you know that you would take special care not to horse around in a dangerous way to avoid getting hurt. The point here is if you knew exactly when your kitchen was going to catch on fire or exactly when you were going to fall and hurt yourself, you would be extra careful to avoid the fire or getting hurt. But you don't know when there's going to be a fire or when you're going to fall in the playground. So what are you supposed to do? You are supposed to be careful *ALL* of the time. That way we can try to avoid kitchen fires and playground injuries *ALL* of the time.

Now back to Jesus and His coming on Christmas Day. But He is also coming again at the end of the world. When is that going to be? In a thousand years? In a hundred years? In ten years? Next year? Tomorrow? Do you know? Of course, none of us know. If you knew that the end of the world is coming on the third Wednesday in January, would you behave in January? When Jesus and His angels get here, you want Him to take you to paradise, don't you? But we don't know that He's coming this January. Or next January. Or in any January. Or any other time, for that matter. So we have to be ready *ALL* the time. We have to be good *ALWAYS*. We have to be prepared *EVERY* day, today, during Advent, and *ALWAYS*, because Jesus *is* coming.

Meanwhile, we can't just have Christmas *today*. We have to wait for Jesus. Sometimes waiting can be hard. The people of Israel had to wait for *thousands* of years for the coming of the Savior, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah. During all that time, the people had prophets to help them. There's another word. *Prophets*. Prophets were special people who heard God's Word and spoke it to the people, including *us* in the Bible. God sent prophets to remind us, His people, of His promise that He would send a Redeemer to save us all from sin. The prophets would be there to urge the people to get ready for the coming of that Redeemer...

Which brings us finally to the first reading today, from the prophet Isaiah, who lived more than 700 years before Jesus was born. He speaks to the Hebrews in today's first reading of a beautiful image of all nations gathered together in the Lord's presence.

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah (**Isaiah 2:1-5**).

This is the vision that Isaiah son of Amoz had about Judah and Jerusalem: In the future the mountain with the Lord's temple will be the highest of all. It will reach above the hills and every nation will rush to it. Many people will come and say, "Let's go to the mountain of the Lord God of Jacob and worship in his temple." The Lord will teach us his Law from Jerusalem. He will settle the arguments of nations and of people. They will pound their swords and their spears into garden tools. And they will never make war or attack other nations. People of Israel, let's live by the light of the Lord. The word of the Lord.

Isaiah's message is very comforting, especially to the Hebrews, the people of Israel, who throughout their history, were either getting conquered by other nations or worried about being conquered, even to this very day. He tells us that if everyone were to follow God's word, war would end, and there would be peace among all nations. In his reading, the warriors beat their swords into gardening tools, because they would never need them again to fight battles because of that peace. And the person God sent into the world to bring us this peace was Jesus to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy, the prophecy he made 700 years before Jesus was born. How did he know that? Isaiah was a prophet.

Let's turn our attention now to our Psalm for today. Today's psalm, Psalm #122, is a prayer of peace and joy in Jerusalem. To the Hebrews Jerusalem represents that kingdom in Isaiah's image of peace, especially in God's house.

Responsorial Psalm (**Psalm 122:1-2, 8-9**).

Let us go to the house of the Lord.

*Let us go to the house of the Lord.*

I was happy when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!" We are now standing inside Jerusalem."

*Let us go to the house of the Lord.*

For my family and friends I will say, "Peace be within Jerusalem." For the sake of God's house, I will search for the good that is in Jerusalem.

*Let us go to the house of the Lord.*

So we have established that Christmas is coming, and there's all this stuff to do. Sometimes people get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of preparing for Christmas fun, parties, and presents, that they forget the important part about Christmas, that is, Jesus! But what about Jesus? How can we prepare for the coming of *Jesus*? Prayer is one way. But how about what the song says? You know the song about being good. "You better watch out. You better not pout...Santa Claus is coming to town?" Sure, everyone knows that song. And just like it says in that song, Advent is a time for preparing ourselves by behaving better as we wait for *Jesus* to come at Christmas.

That brings us to our second reading from St. Paul to the Romans as he tells us how to act.

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans (**Romans 13:11-13**):

Sisters and Brothers: You know what sort of times we live in, and so you should live properly. It is time to wake up. You know that the day when we will be saved is nearer than when we first put our faith in the Lord. Night is almost over, and day will soon appear. We must stop behaving as people do in the dark and be ready for the light.

So behave properly, as people do in the daylight. The word of the Lord.

So St. Paul tells us to behave because "...the day that we will be saved is nearer..." Isn't that amazing? It's almost as if St. Paul knew the words to *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town*. Do you think he did? Maybe he used to sing that song with the early Christians. Well, maybe not, but St. Paul does tell us that because the end of the world is near, nearer than we can guess, and may very well be soon, we should try even harder to please God, especially now for us because it is Advent.

Now let's turn our attention to the gospel acclamation and the gospel. In today's gospel, Matthew tells us what Jesus says about the end of time when He is coming again, and how to prepare for it.

*Alleluia, Alleluia. Alleluia, Alleluia.*

Lord, show us Your mercy and love, and grant us Your salvation.

*Alleluia, Alleluia.*

+ A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew (**Matthew: 24:37-44**).

Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Son of Man appears, things will be just as they were when Noah lived. People were eating, drinking and getting married right up to the day that the flood came and Noah went into the big boat. They didn't know what was happening until the flood came and swept them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of man appears. "Two men will be in the same field, but only one will be taken. The other will be left. Two women will be together grinding grain, but only one will be taken. The other will be left. "So be on your guard! You don't know when your Lord will come. Homeowners never know when a thief is coming, and they are always on guard to keep one from breaking

in. *Always* be ready! You don't know when the Son of Man will come." The gospel of the Lord.

In the verse just before the start of today's gospel (Matthew 24:36), Jesus says about the day He will return, "No one knows what day the Son of Man will return, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only God the Father knows." Remembering our discussion about the fire in the kitchen and falling in the playground, Jesus talks about the same sort of thing when He discusses the homeowner in His parable. He says that if the owner of the house knew when the thief was coming, don't you think he'd be ready for him, to prevent his breaking in? So just like we need to be careful to avoid fires and injuries *ALL* the time, Jesus tells us to be prepared, in case there's a thief, *ALL* the time. Likewise, He says that *ALL* the time you need to be ready for *His* coming, both at Christmas and at the end of the world.

Isaiah and the Psalm tell us how wonderful the kingdom of heaven will be when the Messiah comes. St. Paul tells us that we should behave in order to be ready for the coming of Jesus. And Jesus Himself tells us about the need to be ready *ALL* the time. So on this first Sunday of Advent, be prayerful, behave, and be ready...today, during Advent, and always. Jesus is coming!

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in today's readings. Speak about it with your parents.

First Sunday of Advent, 2022  
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