



Jesus is Coming (Back)!

How Should We Live (Now)?

*A Collection of Devotionals for the
Weeks of Advent, 2024*

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Epiclesis
An Ancient-Future Faith Christian Church

Introduction to the Series

Jesus is Coming (Back)! How Do We Live (Now)?

A note from Pastor Chris:

It's beginning to look a lot like... Advent? This year, as we do each year, we published a little booklet that talks about the meaning of the Advent season (and I hope you'll pick one up at church or download it from the website). One of the things that booklet says is that Advent is helpful because it causes us to slow down, say "no" to the consumer-driven aspects of the Christmas season, and take stock in what it means that Christ is coming.



This time of year, folks from all walks of life are already getting ready for Christmas— at least the commercial kind of Christmas. You only have to look at decorations in the stores to see that the rush of the season has already started for many people.

But Christians believe that the true meaning of Christmas has not much to do with gifts and Santa Claus and department store sales. Believers hold that Christmas is all about the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And we also believe that Advent gives Christians a time-honored, biblically based way to prepare.

But here's one other curious thing about the season: *Advent is as much about Christ's second coming as His first. What in the world does that mean?*

Well, it might surprise you to learn that the historic Church focused as much on the return of Jesus as victorious Lord during the lead up to Christmas as it did His first coming as a baby.

What a gift for the Church! In the Season of Advent, we can marvel and take delight (and unpack all the meaning) that God became Incarnate in Jesus in the long ago. But we can also give thanks and rejoice (and unpack all the meaning) that Christ is surely going to come again the second time.

Your Epiclesis pastors, Ellen, Rick, and I, have written some devotional thoughts to accompany each of the Sundays in Advent to help you ponder the week's Scriptures— and, especially this year, to focus on the wonderful truth that Jesus is coming back.

Bless your Advent Season, Church! Pastor Chris

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Devotionals and Meditations Sunday Scriptures in Advent, 2024

Week One: Lighting the Candle of Hope: Pastor Chris

There are many traditions about what the candles stand for on each Sunday of Advent. Our practice at Epiclesis is that on the first Sunday in Advent, we light the candle of HOPE— Hope as we eagerly await Christ's coming!



Here are some things to think about. First, the Scriptures we will use on the first Sunday of Advent are: Jeremiah 33:14-16, Psalm 25:1-10, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, and Luke 21:25-36.

The Jeremiah passage is one of the traditional prophecies that promise the first coming of Jesus.

The Psalm passage reminds us that the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful— and that He watches over the ways of those who keep the covenant. To me, that's another wonderful Old Testament reminder that a New Covenant (in Jesus) is coming.

The Luke passage is a discourse where Jesus prophesizes about the coming judgment to Jerusalem and those who are outside of the covenant in Him. (Though we'll save the last verse of it for just a bit later).

But I'd love you to take an even closer look at the 1 Thessalonians passage. Paul is writing to the church at Thessalonica. Now, he'll get more explicit about the second coming of Christ in chapter 5, but, here, he's beginning to talk a bit about how Christians should live

until Jesus comes again. He says this in verses 12 and 13: "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy...."

And why should Christians live in such a way right now? Well because this kind of behavior is the hallmark of faithful believers when Jesus comes again. He says behave this way "so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

Listen: Some day (thank God) Jesus is coming again! And we want to be found faithful. We want to be blameless and holy when He comes. And that's the motivation for our Christianly behavior until that day.

Oh, and one more thing: And that last verse from the Luke passage? He records an admonition from Jesus Himself that surely encourages us to do the same. Jesus' timeless words which may have been about the coming destruction of Jerusalem is just as timely for us as we wait for His coming: "Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

Week Two: Lighting the Candle of Love: Pastor Rick

For the second week of Advent, the focus Scriptures are: Malachi 3:1-4, Luke 1:68-79, Philippians 1:3-11, and Luke 3:1-6.

As I read through them, Romans 10:15 came to mind: "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"



On this particular Sunday, those messengers are Malachi, Zechariah, John the Baptist, and the Apostle Paul. It would be worth your time to read each of these texts, one a day, and consider how they relate to the idea/ideal of love as taught and lived by Jesus.

I was especially drawn to Philippians 1:3-11 (one of my favorite books in the Bible). In this text, you really get a sense of the love that Paul has for this church family. Here's something to meditate on: What is the connection between love and the "Good News" Paul talks about?

Here are four things I noticed in this text: First, Paul refers to his readers as his partners in spreading the good news (1:5).

He also encourages them that the Good News is a good work in their lives that will be fully realized on the day of Jesus' return (1:6).

Paul also commends them for defending and confirming the Good News through their lives (1:7).

Finally, living lives marked by love and the Good News allows them to understand what really matters and to live pure and blameless with each other and the community around them (1:10).

Maybe, as we start a new year following Jesus, you need a spiritual pedicure? Maybe you need to be reminded and encouraged of the good work Jesus started in you as you live the Good News? Maybe you need the Good News to help you recenter on what/who really matters in your life?

Feet are designed for moving forward, so get going!

Week Three: Lighting the Candle of Joy: Pastor Ellen

Scriptures for this week: *Zephaniah 3:14-20, Isaiah 12:2-6, Philipians 4:4-7, Luke 3:7-18.*

"Oh, tidings of comfort and joy...." "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!"

Throughout the season, the strains of the familiar carols remind us that "it's the most wonderful time of the year." And especially for us— the Body of Christ, who know the hope, love, joy, and peace of His salvation— we can truly agree that this is a wondrous, joyous season. And yet, so much of our time can be spent on thoughts that dilute or deprive us of the joy that is ours in Christ. These can include thoughts such as: "Things will be much more joyful in the future when I've done thus or so;" or, "If only I hadn't ...", or even a more general, negative focus on the tensions and trials of the day.

How should we think of joy? Dictionaries provide definitions like mirth, delight, or feelings of gladness. But the scriptural picture of joy is much deeper and enduring than emotional responses to seasons or situations. This joy is steadfast and abiding, springing up from our relationship with God and the fulfillment of His promises.

The Zephaniah passage is a beautiful picture of this joy, both of what He has done for us and of promises still to come at the Second Coming. Look closely, and see that this joy is reciprocal, for the Lord rejoices and exults over us, too. This is a gladsome picture indeed!

The Isaiah passage enlarges this picture, for "with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.... He has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth!"

In Luke 3, we read the response and teaching of John the Baptist, when the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" – how shall we live "in keeping with repentance," in view of the coming of the Messiah? John's answers may surprise us; surely they surprised



some of his listeners. But his answers point to a life consistent with the sense of well-being and contentment that transcends worldly concerns – a life of true joy.

Finally, how – and why – do we share “tidings of comfort and joy” in the world around us, not only in what we say but in how we live in the here and now? Paul tells us, in the familiar verses of Philippians 4: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. So may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Week Four: Lighting the Candle of Peace: Pastor Rick

For the fourth week of Advent, the texts we focus on are Micah 5:2-5, Psalm 80:1-7, Hebrews 10:5-10, and Luke 1:39-55. This week's texts made me think of John 16:33:

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me.

Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows.

But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

Peace is a tricky concept because we often equate it with the absence of conflict, trials or sorrows. But, is that what biblical peace looks like? Is it even possible here on earth, even as a follower of Jesus?

Take time to read this week's texts from Micah, Psalm 80, and Hebrews. Use your spiritual imagination here: What is happening in these texts? What are God's people experiencing? Where is peace found in these texts? Is peace a "now" thing or a "future" thing for followers of Jesus?

Now, compare and contrast what you have discovered from the above texts with that of Luke 1:46-55. Is Mary experiencing a peaceful time in her life? What clues does her song give you about her faith? About how she viewed her life and current circumstances?

How about you? How are you experiencing peace right now? How do these four texts help you respond to where you are at here and now? How does knowing that Jesus overcame the world help you have peace? If you were to compose a song (like Mary's) what would you say?



Epiclesis

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