

Beloved friends, we are entering into a new church year and the season of Advent where we prepare ourselves, wait in anticipation, and make ourselves ready for the return of Jesus the Christ.

Advent is a delightful season observed in many Christian traditions as a time of expectant waiting, preparation, and watchfulness for the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas. It includes the four Sundays preceding Christmas, and is the first season of the Christian church year. The word “advent” means “coming”, and so advent describes the coming of Christ (as a baby) or the second coming of Christ, when He returns.

“Advent is both a wonderful and a challenging liturgical season. We begin a new church year while the world is busy finishing a calendar year—and the month is filled with shopping, pageants, and parties beyond what our energy and time can handle. But while society urges us to hurry and spend, scripture and tradition beckon us to slow down and wait.” Each week this month, at the beginning of worship, we will light the candles on the Advent wreath. Maybe you have an advent wreath at home—or maybe, after reading this, you can make a simple one with 4 candles. I invite you to do so and make this a family tradition of lighting the candles and offering thanks and praise to God for the gifts we have already been given and share with one another.

“The wreath can be traced to the Romans’ ancient rite of waiting in the darkness for the return of the sun, and for the Feast of the Sun on December 25. The ancients...took a wheel off their wagons and fastened torches to it to see them through the darkness. The only thing alive in the winter, evergreen, was brought inside and fastened to the wheel. To those huddled in darkness, it was a sign of vegetation and springtime. More than three hundred years ago, German Christians fashioned the same elements into the Advent wreath—the greens a sign of hope and eternity. What was once a Feast of the *Sun* has become for us the Feast of the *Son*.”

Today our Advent wreaths are often purchased, as are Advent calendars (sometimes containing a piece of chocolate for each day!) “Both are symbols and tools of what Advent urges us to do: mark the passage of time as we wait. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Advent is about the art of waiting. Though many of us are tempted to act otherwise, now is the time for slowing down and leaning together. As with the ancients, we gather in the darkness to wait for the light. Consider doing the same with your family and friends.

As twenty-first century people, we are not good at either embracing darkness or slowing down. We don’t even know darkness anymore—we’ve banished it with electricity, everywhere and at all hours. And we certainly can’t wait. We look for the shortest line at the grocery store and rush through yellow lights. But we know incubation is what we often most need: for grapes to become fine wine, for a novel to be written, for dough to rise, for a crop to grow, for a baby to be born. It is in the waiting that we learn about ourselves and others, taking important steps toward understanding. Perhaps there is no better gift to teach our children than the ability to wait. Christmas *is* coming: it’s just not here yet.”

See you in worship, my friends!

Rev. Erik Karlson
Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish

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