

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

December 7, 2025 (2nd Sunday in Advent, Year A)
Matthew 3:1-12; Romans 14:4-13; Isaiah 11:1-10

You may remember this from Holy Humor Sunday. A pastor went out one day to visit a parishioner. He didn't call ahead. He went to the house, and it was obvious that someone was home, but no one came to the door, even after he'd knocked several times. Finally, he took out his business card and wrote on it "Revelation 3:20" and stuck it in the door.

When the offering was counted the following Sunday, he found that his card had been returned. Below his message was written: "Genesis 3:10." The pastor had a good laugh.

You see, Revelation 3:20 reads: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with me." Genesis 3:10 reads: "And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked."

Advent is about preparing for an arrival: CHRIST'S arrival. The word "Advent" ACTUALLY MEANS "coming" or "arrival."

We tend to EQUATE Advent with CHRISTMAS, and expect to jump RIGHT into it after Thanksgiving. And that would certainly be in keeping with our CULTURE, where the COMING of Christmas—not so much Christmas ITSELF, but the COMING of Christmas—is celebrated with stores SELLING and people BUYING. But exactly WHAT is it that we anticipate? WHAT are we getting READY for?

Advent is a TIME to DREAM of THAT world, dream of a world turned upside down, dream of what the world COULD be, WILL be, to DREAM.

Listen again to Isaiah's vision: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD."

It's BEAUTIFUL. It's everything the Bible calls "shalom": a COSMIC kind of peace. It's a return to the garden of Eden, an image of what the PERFECT coexistence of all creation might LOOK like.

Another dream is Paul's word to the Romans. "Live in harmony with one another," he says, "with one voice glorify God," he says, and "welcome one another." PEACE is part of this vision.

When John the Baptist cries out, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," he means it HAS COME. The kingdom of God is NOW. When we were baptized with the Holy Spirit, with Isaiah's words, "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD," we were baptized into a DIFFERENT world, the kingdom of GOD. For us who believe, the kingdom is NOW. We are called to LIVE this vision NOW.

And yet, something is not RIGHT. On the one hand, Jesus HAS come. God has acted and we are living AFTER the day of the Lord. Death and sin and every sort of oppression have been dealt their FATAL blow. On the other hand, they seem to be DEALING with their death pretty WELL. We look around us and there's something TERRIBLY WRONG. Death and sin and every sort of oppression are STILL THERE, STILL at work. Even on this side of the nativity, God's promises go ... UNFULFILLED. As we sing in one of our hymns (Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service):

Still your children wander homeless
Still the hungry cry for bread;
Still the captives long for freedom;
Still in grief we mourn our dead.

And it's not just the world; there's something wrong in US TOO. The call to REPENT wouldn't be NECESSARY if there WEREN'T something wrong. In baptism, we have been declared and MADE saints by God. And yet, we are STILL SINNERS in need of redeeming. In spite of our best INTENTIONS, we DON'T do the good we want, and we DO the very thing we DON'T want to do.

To say the kingdom is near is to say that it's SO CLOSE to us to that we can SEE its beauty, and FEEL its warmth, and KNOW its presence, and yet its PROMISE HASN'T been fully revealed.

Advent reminds us that we are in the MEANTIME – the TIME when MEAN things STILL happen – the time BETWEEN the RESURRECTION and Christ's SECOND coming.

The great word for Advent, the Aramaic cry, "Maranatha," means BOTH "Our Lord HAS come" and "COME, O Lord." It has BOTH tenses. It's both a PRESENT reality and a prayer for the FUTURE. Christ has ALREADY come, but has YET to come AGAIN. Like DAWN'S FIRST light, the reign of God has BROKEN into our midst, but the SON is STILL approaching.

As Christians, we don't spend Advent waiting and hoping for December 25th, EXPECTANTLY ANTICIPATING CHRISTMAS; we spend it waiting for God to SEE the PROMISE THROUGH, to COMPLETE it, not only in Christ's coming in the past, but in Christ's RETURN in the future. Things are not YET as God has promised they will BE, but because God's promises are ABSOLUTELY DEPENDABLE, that promise WILL BE FULFILLED.

In the MEANTIME, we are called to PREPARE the WAY of the Lord. We prepare for the coming of Christ by turning AWAY from the ways of the WORLD, and RETURNING to the ways of CHRIST.

We prepare for the coming of Christ by LIVING NOW as the baptized citizens of the kingdom of God that we ARE, even in the MIDST of a world that DENIES that kingdom.

We prepare for the coming of Christ by REPENTING – OPENING ourselves to a CHANGED life, a BETTER WAY.

We prepare for the coming of Christ by DREAMING those BEAUTIFUL dreams of Advent, and then TAKING them SERIOUSLY, and LETTING them turn the world UPSIDE DOWN.

PREPARE the WAY of the Lord! In the words of Romans: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope."

Hear that AGAIN, because sometimes we just pass OVER words that are familiar, without REALLY HEARING them. "May the God OF HOPE fill you with all JOY and PEACE in believing, so that YOU may ABOUND in hope." That's the dream. That's what Advent is about. That's why we're here. "May you ABOUND in hope."

May it be MORE than a dream; may it be a REALITY – in YOU. Amen.