

Grace and Peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ Amen.

Happy New Year! It's been a long one but aren't we all glad we get to start anew! Today we get to celebrate! Today we get to look forward with hope in our hearts. Hope that is kindled again. This hope that has burned for thousands and thousands of years. This hope that will never be quenched.

So today marks the new year in our church Calendar. It runs a little bit differently than our normal monthly calendar that we are a bit more used to seeing and thinking about. The church calendar is kind of an odd one. Its seasons are separated not by the temperature outside but by specific events, specific high holidays which we celebrate together as the Christian community around the world, no matter what the denomination. And the first high holiday which we all celebrate is Christmas. So, if that is the First high holiday you might be wondering why we don't just start the new year there? It's a valid question. And a good one. But it was decided a long time ago that while Christ is central to our faith and salvation, we cannot leave out what came before. And what came before is almost just as important as the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

What came before was waiting. What came before was people trying to find a way back to God, find a way back into the fold. These people trying to earn their place before God, and then again and again being told the messiah is coming. The messiah is coming.

That is the meaning of Advent. These 4 and a half weeks are a time holding onto the promises of God the same way that the Israelites did, day after day, week after week month after month for thousands of years. The messiah is coming. The one who will save us is coming. The one who will show us the way is coming. The Son of God is on the way.

This is the tension that this section of the church year wraps us in. this is a lesson in its self. Thanksgiving is just over and I bet a large percentage of you are already done Christmas shopping, or will be by the end of cyber Monday. I bet many of you have Christmas lights up and a tree illuminating your living room with it blazing colors and sparkling baubles. I'm not trying to judge, all those are true in my home. I also know the radio is already cranking out all my favorite carols.

We want Christmas to be here. We want to live in Christmas. And yet today in our worship we stand millennia away. We stand here with nothing but hope and faith. When we page back through those 39 books of the bible, for a large percentage of that, we find the people of God holding onto nothing else other than hope and faith in their God.

We hear about Noah gripping the side of the boat the storm rages, we heard Jonah praying thin the depth of the sea inside the whale. We hear Abraham at 90 praying for a child, we heard of Jacob alone and desolate under that stars, We heard joseph locked up in prison dreaming dreams, we heard the cries of the slaves in Egypt crying out fearsome laments to their God. All these people had was there hope and their faith in their God. and I have only barely scratched the surface to the first book of the bible. Only 1 out of the 39 books that tell the stories of this

people of God crying out to their God in their pain and worry, these people praying when they were stressed and exhausted, these people who were at the end of their ropes and had nothing and nowhere to go. All they had was hope and faith.

Now I love Christmas. I love so so much about it. But I hope you will try and stay in this season of Advent for these next few weeks. It's a big thing to ask I know. But just so you know, in the church calendar there are 12 full days celebrating the birth of Jesus. And it's not supposed to be just like 12 days of like yay Jesus is born, its 12 days of feasts and gifts and party and celebration.

By the time we get there every one is like ok we get it Jesus was born, we've been hearing this message for a month straight from every angle in our lives.

But that makes this time of advent all the more special, all the more important. A vital part of the story of our faith is a story of waiting and hoping. It's a vital part of our own personal faiths as well. We do not get everything just as we want it whenever we want it. Sometimes we linger in times of pain and want. Sometimes we cannot see more then 2 steps in front of us. Sometimes the answers of our prayers come back as not right now. And so, we wait and hope and Hold onto our faith and our God.

This is not some desperate hope that we hold onto. This is the hope of a child upon seeing the Christmas tree rise. This is the hope we see with the lighting of one more candle every week. This is a sure and certain hope that God will be with us today and tomorrow. That God comes to us and answers our prayers. That our God will hold us and support us and care for us no matter what.

Jesus gives us these words in our Gospel

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Do not let your hope or your faith fall asleep. Keep it awake, keep hope burning. The messiah is coming.