

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Michael J. Hoyt
Glenshaw Presbyterian Church
November 30, 2003
First Sunday of Advent

The Coming of Our Lord Jesus
Luke 21:25-36; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Well, what are you waiting for? (pause)

What *are* you waiting for? (pause)

What are *you* waiting for?

A lot of things, I bet.

Probably, you are waiting for some pretty big things in your life..

Surgery. Test results. Recovery from a long, frustrating illness.

Waiting to have a baby. Or to have grandchildren.

Waiting to have a good job again, or a better job, or any job.

Waiting for the healing of a broken relationship.

I would say you're waiting for Christmas, but I'm not sure,
since we have it shoved in our face in October now,
with price tags dangling everywhere.

What are you waiting for?

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Advent is the church's season of waiting,
of anticipation, and preparation...
...for what?

For the coming of our Lord Jesus.

And by this we mean at least two things:

We mean we are waiting, anticipating, preparing for Christmas,
for the celebration of the birth of Christ.

But also and equally, we wait during Advent for the Second Coming of Christ.

When we recite the Apostles' Creed

we say that we believe that "he will come again to judge the quick and the dead."

In one sense, we believe "the work of Christ is finished..."

That is, the cross and resurrection accomplished all that is needed to save us,
but the victory of Christ is not yet visible in the whole world.

It is still known only by faith.

To believe in the Second Coming is to "believe that the time will come
when [Christ's] victory will be [unquestionably clear to everyone,]
to the whole cosmos."ⁱ

But sometimes, in this season of Advent, we forget about the Second Coming.
and think only about the first coming of Christ at Christmas.

As a result of our forgetfulness,

we get confused by the scripture readings for Advent;
they seem to be all out of sequence in relation to Christmas:

We read about Jesus teaching the disciples in Jerusalem.

We read about John the Baptist, who comes along after Jesus was born.

It seems we should just be reading the parts of the story before
the manger scene in Bethlehem.

But Advent does not simply look forward to the retelling of the Christmas story,
but also looks forward to the day when God will bring to final fulfillment
what began in that manger in Bethlehem.

The miracle of Jesus' birth gives us hope for that final fulfillment.

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For our spiritual ancestors in the early church,
the possibility of the church ever *forgetting* about the Second Coming
would have seemed absolutely absurd.

For them, it seemed that Christ's return was just over the horizon of history.
They were ready and waiting for it to happen at any moment.
They had seen the signs Jesus foretold. The kingdom was at hand.
The day of their redemption had drawn near,
and they were earnestly preparing to stand before the Son of Man.

For us, well... we've been waiting for a *long time*.
One might argue that the signs of the day of the Lord have been happening
ever since Jesus described them, for the past 2 millennia.
Wars, earthquakes, famines.
Constant turmoil in the Middle East, in Jerusalem.
Distress among the nations.

For some, the long wait has become a reason to give up hope, to stop believing
that Christ will come again, or that Jesus was the Messiah in the first place.

Well, wherever we may stand on the timeline between the First and the Second Coming,
it seems that the truth of either of these comings of the Lord
can only be perceived by faith.

The season of Advent keeps the church's faith alive as we endure the wait.
The season of Advent, when we celebrate it well,
offers healing from our spiritual amnesia,
and frees us from the monotony of what has become in our culture
a single, never-ending shopping season.

Advent keeps us hoping, anticipating, acting out the story of Christ's coming;
it helps us the mark time, not just in the annual cycles of seasons,

but on the larger timeline of God's promises.
Our Advent celebration seeks to preserve the hope in our hearts,
that God will complete what God has begun in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus describes the signs that foretell the Day of the Lord,
he speaks of two kinds of people, two kinds of reactions to these signs:
Some people *will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world.*
But you, the disciples, *when these things begin to take place,*
stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.
For those who put their trust in Jesus Christ,
the time of his coming is a time to rejoice and be glad.

So, this Advent, whatever you are waiting for,
let your waiting be an occasion to remember
that, in Christ, your redemption is drawing near.

Are you waiting for the surgery that you hope will work miracle in your body?
Wait in hope, and look beyond your surgery in the assurance that
God will give you perfect health and wholeness at the coming of our Lord Jesus.
Are you waiting to hear news from your doctor?
Wait in hope, and look beyond that news in the assurance that
the final and eternal news is good:
God will redeem your body from decay at the coming of our Lord Jesus.
Illness and disease are not the last word for you;
the health and strength of youth will be restored
in God's kingdom.

Are you waiting for justice to be done to you and your family?
Keep striving for it, keep insisting upon it;
But then look beyond what meager justice we can achieve in this world,
and know that God will establish perfect justice and peace
when Jesus comes with all the saints.

Are you waiting for God to provide a job for you that will sustain your family?
Wait in hope, and let the season of Advent remind you
just how far God is willing to go to take care of you and those you love.
The God who entered the world at Christmas
will not leave you hopeless or alone in the dark,
and God will meet every need at the coming of our Lord Jesus.

Are you waiting with high hopes that the joy you've lost will return to you?
Remember this Advent that you belong to the family of God,
the family that rejoices in the news of angels,
and celebrates the coming of Joy into the world.

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But we cannot simply talk about what the coming of our Lord Jesus gives to us.
We must hear what his coming calls us to be and do for the world.

Even as the season of Advent give us hope, it also calls us to a mission.

As those who watch and wait and prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus,
we ourselves *become* a sign of his coming.

We who wait and hope and believe,
offer light to those who walk in darkness;
we offer peace to those who tremble with foreboding
at the condition of our world.

The Apostle Paul writes to the believers in Thessalonica, and says,
*How can we thank God enough for you
in return for all the joy that we feel...because of you?*
What gave Paul and his companions such great joy?
The existence of a community of believers who held fast to the faith,
and who were looking forward, with them,
to the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

You, dear Christian family, *are the greatest sign* of Christ's coming
You are a sign to each other, and to the world.
In your believing as you wait and prepare for the day of the Lord,
you impart joy, and hope, and light to those who see your faith.
You hold fast to your faith for your own sake,
but also for the sake of a fearful world, groping in the darkness,
desperately needing a reason to hope.

So let the candles of Advent *remind* you that a light is shining in the darkness,
for you;
a light that is coming to save you, as surely as the sun will rise.
And let the candles of Advent also *call* you
to shine that light in the darkness
so that others may cast off their fear, lift up their heads,
and rejoice
that the Savior of the world has come, and is coming again.

Amen.

ⁱ Catherine Gonzalez, "Preaching the Advent Lectionary," *Journal for Preachers*, Advent 2003, p. 3.