

Studies from the Advent Lectionary

Advent... Advent is the first season of the Church year, beginning 4 full Sundays prior to Christmas Day. Advent is a season of anticipation, repentance, preparation, and hope. The word **Advent** comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming.” Therefore, the season of Advent is all about the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Though for most, the central focus of Advent is the coming of the baby Jesus, Advent is also about Jesus’ coming to Jerusalem to die on the cross and be raised again, and His coming on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead. In a very real way, too, Advent also helps prepare us for our Lord who comes to us continually through His Word, Holy Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper.

Customs and traditions of Advent... In liturgical churches, the colors used for paraments (cloths around the altar, lectern & pulpit) is either *purple* (signifying royalty and repentance) or *blue* (signifying hope and anticipation). Liturgical colors – although clearly man made customs and therefore *adiaphora*, do serve the message of the season. The following is taken from the LC-MS webpage concerning the colors of the season:

Color, like music, plays an important role in the life of God’s worshipping people. Just as music is the “handmaiden to theology,” liturgical color compliments the message of the seasons and occasions during the church year. Taking a familiar seat in the nave of his/her chapel preceding worship on any given Sunday, the worshipper’s emotions and intellect are immediately engaged by color. Liturgical colors aid in establishing a climate in which Law and Gospel may be heard and received.

Other Advent customs include the use of Advent wreaths both in church and at home, with 5 candles on them (ask the junior confirmation class the meaning/name for each candle/week of Advent & they should be able to tell you). During Advent it is also customary to decorate the church/sanctuary and to set up a nativity scene. Additionally, many Christian families use Advent calendars to teach and countdown the days until Christmas. Finally, the readings and hymns of the season are used to instruct and prepare our hearts for our Lord’s coming.

Readings for the First Sunday in Advent...

Jeremiah 33:14-16 – Please Read (written by the Prophet Jeremiah around 600 B.C.)

What does Jeremiah – through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – assume the hearers of his message are aware of or understand? Put another way, what have faithful Israelites been waiting centuries for? (see 2 Samuel 7:12-13 & Isaiah 11:1-10).

This prophesy is obviously about Jesus. We understand the connection discussed in question #1. But what is meant by vs. 18? (see Genesis 14:17-24, Psalm 110, Hebrews 5:1-10 & Romans 8:33-34).

Why do you think the Christian Church uses this reading (and has for 1,600 years, or so) for Advent? In other words, does this passage from Jeremiah fit with the season of Advent & the customs and traditions discussed above? Why or why not?

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 – Please Read (Written by the Apostle Paul around 51 A.D.)

(The Thessalonian Christians endured much hardship and persecutions from the Jews in the area. They were standing firm in their faith, but they did worry about fellow believers who had died before Jesus came back. Paul wrote to encourage their faith and allay their concerns).

Why do you think this is a traditional Advent reading?

Discuss vs. 10. How does the Lord strengthen what is lacking in our faith? How is this consistent with the themes of Advent?

Discuss vs. 13. What advent of our Lord's is being described here? Who are the saints mentioned here?

Luke 19:28-40 – Please Read (Written by Luke around 55-60 A.D.)

In Focus... Here Jesus rides into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday to the cheering of the crowds. He came humble and riding on the foal of a donkey as foretold in Zechariah 9:9. Shortly after this "triumphal entry", the same adoring crowds would forsake Him and He would be crucified for the sins of the world. This was the reason for His coming in the first place (Mark 1:38 & John 18:37)

In Perspective... So why are we talking about Palm Sunday on the First Sunday of Advent? We recall Advent is all about our preparation for the coming of our Lord. How do you focus on Jesus' coming during Advent? What are some of your family traditions? Do you just think about Christmas, or do you let the true meaning of the Advent season shine through?

In Context... The focus of today's readings is God's promise to send the Messiah. That promise was first made all the way back in Genesis 3:15, and continues throughout the entire Old Testament. Therefore, it can rightly be said that the entire Old Testament – like the New Testament – is about Jesus...from the perspective of His promised coming though, as opposed to the reality that He has come. Were the people of Jesus' day prepared for His advent in

Jerusalem and on the cross? Or did they miss Him entirely? Some clearly were prepared and recognized Him (the thief on the cross [Luke 23:40-43] & the Roman Centurian [Mark 15:39]), while those who might be expected to, did not (Pharisees & religious leaders [Mark 15:31]). Do people miss our Lord's coming today? What are people focusing on this time of year & how does it influence their recognizing Jesus & His advent?

In Search...

Jesus' Triumphal Entry was at one time simply a prophesy (Zechariah 9:9). Now it is history. The same can be said of His birth in Bethlehem. Discuss how we Christians today are, nonetheless, in a very similar situation to those of Jesus' day when it comes to His advent?

What do vs. 30-33 reveal about Jesus?

What do the details of Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" reveal about how God sees things as compared to how fallen human beings see things?

Why does Jesus say, "the very stones would cry out" in vs. 40?

Compare Luke 19:38 with Luke 2:14 & discuss the "peace" being spoken of in these two passages.