

Advent 1C
Luke 21:25-36
29 November 2009
Christ Church

My weekdays at Christ Church are usually very long. I arrive for “Wellness Morning” as dawn is breaking, and often drive home long after the sun has set. This was not the case until the time changed a few weeks ago. Before that, while driving home, I enjoyed looking at the shops of Norcross, and then those of Lilburn on the winding drive through Old Town.

The daylight continues to wane as the Winter Solstice draws near. For those with seasonal affective disorder, or perhaps those who are UGA or FSU fans, the battle of depression begins. The darker months of the Northern Hemisphere make us more vulnerable.

My family has been in the funeral business for over 100 years. Statistics show that there are more funerals between Thanksgiving and New Years than at any other time during the year. My sister, who was once in charge of a hospital lab

in Richmond, usually worked long hours because of the increase of illness during that time.

If the loss of sunlight causes a loss of equilibrium to us, think of its impact to the ancients who worshipped the sun God. They faced the terrifying possibility that their god was abandoning them. And, so as to reassure themselves of survival, or to coax their god to give them a second chance, they brought their wagon wheels indoors and festooned them with candles and greenery.

The candles offered warmth and light; the greenery, hope for their future. They were reminders that, although the gods might be temporarily displeased, another growing season would eventually come. We recognize the carry over of this practice in the Advent Wreath we have by the altar this morning and during all the Sundays of Advent.

It is no accident that, as these people of northern Europe became Christians, their teachers used this climatic season as a teaching tool about the nature of Christ. Christ, the Savior,

has come into this world of darkness and brought the one, true, eternal light – a light that never fails.

The early Christians used all of the seasons as a means to understand and embrace the life of Christ. His birth – the light come into the world – is celebrated at the winter solstice, the darkest time of the year. His passion is remembered in the dead of winter and pre-spring; His resurrection as spring bursts forth, and His earthy life in the growing seasons of late Spring and Summer.

So, here we are today, celebrating the beginning of a new liturgical year with this the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a beautiful season, one that is easily over shadowed by Christmas preparations. It is fitting that we begin our Christian year in the dark. Were it not so, why would we have any need for the light – the light which is Christ?

The passage of Luke's Gospel that read on this first Sunday of Advent reflects the darkness of our world. Jesus warns of signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars; He speaks of

the distress among the nations, the confusion of cataclysmic events in the sea and the waves. This is a fearful time – a time of great trouble when men and women are apt to assuage their stress with dissipation and drunkenness.

And it is in this morass of chaos, that Christ is coming to us. We might not see this as entirely good news. For Luke's Gospel gives us a sense that we better be doing what we ought when he arrives – be alert – be ready!

Why the urgency? Those of us who are experiencing loss and sorrow amidst the glitter and glitz of the season have some idea of the urgency. When we are feeling disoriented, afraid, lonely, wondering how we will survive the loss of employment, how we will take care of our families, how we will be taken care of in our old age, the urgency of Christ's coming makes a lot more sense.

We become deeply aware of our need for God – our need for something higher than our own limited knowledge to lead us through the dark and into the light. Those who feel a less

urgent need for Christ must take a closer look inside. The drunkenness and dissipation that Jesus refers to, is not necessarily alcohol induced. Our culture gives us any number of options to numb ourselves of the truth about the potential for turmoil and trouble.

Advent offers us an opportunity to look inside. It is a season of introspection – a time when we come to terms with those things that we push out of our awareness to think about another time, because we don't know what to do about them. Advent is the time to bring them into the light for Christ's healing love.

Without this season of examination and preparation, Christmas makes little sense to us. So what if Jesus was born in a manger long ago – what difference does that make? It makes a lot of difference when we acknowledge our need of Him. It makes a lot of sense to rejoice at Christ's birth when we surrender our lives in confidence that our inner darkness has a cure in him.

David used to think me a killjoy because I remain adamant of holding off on Christmas decorations until the actual day draws near. But over time, we have found the delay of Christmas, and the celebration of Advent as a time of preparation – both spiritually and culturally.

Rather than bringing out the boxes and decorating the house all at once, he used to take the boys to the attic every night during Advent and bringing down one Christmas decoration at a time. This heightened the anticipation of the joy of Christmas while learning the important lessons of waiting that Advent provides.

Of course, we are anxious, like our pre-Christian ancestors, to reassure ourselves that there is light in the darkness of winter. I admit to a certain joy and relief in seeing the lighted snowflakes on the Main Street of Lilburn as I wind my way home in the dark.

Whatever your custom as a family, allow yourselves a least a little bit of time to reflect and wonder in the dark of this

**holy season. It's message of waiting and anticipation gives
Christ birth an even deeper meaning. I was reminded of this
in an Advent memory my son, John, once shared with me.**

**He said that he particularly liked it when we turned off
the lights in the kitchen, and lit the candles of the Advent
Wreath on the table while singing a verse of "O Come O Come
Emmanuel." May you find joy in the waiting of Advent!**