

Sermon for the First Sunday of Advent

'But concerning the day and the hour, no one knows.'

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It is the oldest of Advent traditions to light a candle. Some put electric candles in their windows. Some light their own Advent candles. At church, we begin to light the candles of an Advent wreath.

When they are waiting for someone to arrive, the British say, 'I'll put the kettle on.' They're British, so they drink tea. In normal countries that did not participate in a nearly universal empire, they simply say 'I'll keep the light on.'

This is how one says that one is waiting for another. In fact, this is how people in all times and in all places have waited for another, to keep the light on, to keep the candle lit, the candle of Advent; Advent, a word that means 'the coming.'

During this season of Advent, we await the coming of the Christ, for this season will culminate in the birth of the Lord made flesh, of Jesus born of St. Mary.

This is easy to wait for, for it is such an obviously happy occasion. Who does not enjoy the coming of a new baby child? They may bring sleepless nights, but that is the parents' problem. For the rest of us, they bring joy and laughter and adorable cuteness.

Even more so, we await not just the birth of a child, but the birth of a child that will work for us our final redemption. We sing of *the silent word pleading*. Pleading, even as an infant, to our God in heaven, that He would adopt us as our children by baptism, and that He would become our Father.

But there is another coming of Christ that Advent celebrates: the coming of Christ not just in the flesh once upon a time two thousand years ago, but His coming in the flesh and the blood every Sunday.

Indeed, every Lord's Day, every Eucharist, is a Second Coming; it is a Last Coming, as we eat and drink the Last Supper. Not *A* Last Supper, but *The* Last Supper, the very one shared by the Lord with the Apostles. For this reason, every Sunday we say, *'do this as often as you drink of it in remembrance of me.'*

We do not celebrate a ceremony on Sunday, we greet our Lord. You do not hear a sermon, you listen to the God who is about to welcome you.

A sermon is worthless. Meaningless drivel dreamed up by a man in black clothes to bore you for ten minutes. That is, it would be worthless, if it were not a prayer, praise, and introduction to the God of the universe made flesh upon the altar. The words of a pastor's imagination are nothing; they are only made something by the Word made flesh that calls to you *'eat, drink.'* It is these words that make useless talk into a sermon, and a sermon into the Word of God.

Yet neither of these two comings of Christ does our Lord speak of today. Neither His incarnation on what we now call Christmas, nor in His dwelling with us in what we call the Eucharist.

He speaks of the coming that the Creed speaks of, the coming when He will *judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.*

The coming where *he shall break the heathen with a rod of iron, and dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.*

The coming where *every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord, in heaven and upon earth and beneath the earth.*

The coming where *he shall make the nations his footstool. Where his sword shall devour. A day of vengeance. A day burning like a furnace, to make desolations upon the earth.*

'A day of darkness, and not light.'

'O Lord, if thou wouldst count iniquities, O Lord, who should stand?'

None can stand, none can walk in the darkness, the darkness of the Day of the Lord.

Yet it is written *'thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.'*

The dread day of the Lord is coming, *yet we are not as they who have not hope*. We do not fear it, we await it. We await the coming of the Lord; for His justice is our justification. His Kingdom is our Gospel, [we are not commanded to be sinless or perfect; but only to wait in hope] and so we keep the light on, and if you are so inclined, keep the kettle on. We burn the candle, for by its brightness, the day of darkness to the faithless is made the day of light, the day of the *light that came into the world*. [As it is written: *let us walk in the light of the Lord.*]

For this reason, the newly baptized are given a candle. They too, in their infancy or old age, wait. Theirs is the dominion, the vengeance, the confession, the grace.

Yet let not the coming of the Lord *to judge the living and the dead be left only to small children*.

'For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

'Therefore, you too must be ready.'

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*Preached
by Pastor Fields*

*Sermon Texts: Isaiah
2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44.*