



I know many of you will feel like an ATM machine now that Christmas is quickly approaching! It seems as if Christmas has come upon us whether we are ready or not. Just a few weeks ago it dawned on me that it would soon be Thanksgiving. I wasn't ready for Thanksgiving, but it came anyway. Now we turn another week and we are staring Christmas in the face. Today begins the first week of Advent. The church has designated the four Sundays prior to Christmas as a time of preparation and anticipation. After all, Christmas is coming whether we want it to or not.

The **first Sunday of Advent** is based upon the idea that the people of God are to live out their lives in the midst of **expectation** and **hope**. Micah 7:7 says, *"I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior."* Each of us, as we live out our lives to the fullest; recognize the importance of anticipating events in the future. We are most satisfied when we are living out of a hopeful future and a desired result.



The **second Sunday of Advent** is based upon the idea that one day; there will be **peace** in our lives. Peace doesn't just happen. Often, we need to have our hearts **prepared** for

Peace. Luke 2:14 was a part of the message the angels brought to the shepherds one evening as Jesus laid in a manger in Bethlehem. Their message was, *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"* The rallying cry around the world is for peace. There is still a war raging between Ukraine and Russia. There is still ongoing civil war in Myanmar, Afghanistan, Columbia,

Ethiopia, Mali, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. There is Terrorist activity in the DC Congo, Iraq, Nigeria, and the Sudan. There is an ongoing drug war in Columbia and Mexico. Not to mention the leading headline story of the conflict between Hamas and Israel.

At the heart of the unrest of multiple protests is the longing desire for peace. You don't see as many people protesting or even aware of the various wars and conflicts around the world. But the silent longing of so many people is to have peace once again without the high cost of losing lives and destroying scarce resources. But until the One that provides peace comes again, (and that one is Christ – not some politician we elect!) there will be no peace in our world.

The **third Sunday of Advent** is based upon the desire for **celebration** and **joy** in our lives. All of us love a good party. We need causes to celebrate and a reason to have joy in our lives. Some during this season of the year do not have any joy. It is as if the joy has been sucked out of them and they cannot find another reason to move forward in life. Christmas reminds us of loved ones that are no longer with us. Christmas often reminds us of events long ago – events we cannot recapture or relive.



The song by Isaac Watts, *"Joy to the World"* reminds us that our joy has come into the world and that joy is derived from none other than the anticipated Messiah, Jesus Christ. Luke recorded the message of the angel's proclamation which said, *"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people."* If we are seeking our joy in other things besides Jesus, we will eventually be disappointed. Some

seek their joy in a bottle, or drugs, or shopping, or even other relationships. But the only lasting joy we can have is found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.



The **fourth Sunday in Advent** emphasizes the reason behind Jesus coming to this terrestrial ball called earth. It was because of God's tremendous **love** for His creation. Adam and Eve were made in the image of God. When Adam and Eve sinned, that perfect image was marred with a sin nature. We all inherited that sinful nature from our parents.

God sent Jesus Christ into the world to restore that broken relationship and renew a fellowship with us once again.

- It was love that drove God to reconcile the world back to Himself.
- It was love that drove God to choose one nation to become a holy people set apart in worship.
- It was love that drove God to plant in the heart of this chosen people a desire for a Messiah.

God fulfilled that desire by sending His One and Only son, Jesus Christ to be the propitiation, or payment, for our sin. Not only did God create us, He has redeemed us with the precious blood of His Son. By accepting the Son through **faith**, not earning it through our works, we are redeemed and renewed into a life-giving relationship with God.

## Isaiah 64:1-9 – Expectation and Hope

**Laverne Burks** came this morning and read a passage of scripture from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. It is thought that this passage of scripture was written while the people of Israel were in captivity in Babylon. The heart cry of the people of Israel was for deliverance. They were a defeated and humiliated people. They had sinned against God by worshipping idols and false gods. God had warned them time and time again to repent and turn back to God. But they turned their noses up at their Creator and the Lord judged them and punished them severely.



My translation of what Isaiah said would be; *“Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down and destroy our enemies. You are a righteous God and we are nothing compared to you. We acknowledge our sin is awful and our sin has destroyed us. We confess that You are the creator and we are Your creation. You are the potter, and we are the clay. Make us your people once again.”*

But in all honesty, do we have that same intensity in our **expectation** and **hope**? If we were truthful, we would have to say, no. We are satisfied with our lives. We have comfortable homes. We have many friends that love us and reach out to us in our times of need. We have enough food in the pantry and enough clothes to wear. With this satisfaction comes complacency.

*Advent*  
*A Season of Hope & Expectation*

We need a holy yearning for the things of God. We need a desire for the presence of God in our lives. We need to recognize that we are nothing apart from God. We need to understand that there are literally hundreds of people in our community that do not know the Prince of Peace.



The sad thing is that we do not care if they go into a Christless eternity. We are so complacent and so self-absorbed in our comfort, wants, and wishes, that if they died not

knowing Christ, we would not shed a tear. We may say, “Oh I heard that so-and-so died.” But we would not be the least bit interested in his or her eternal home. God, give to us a holy desire for the souls of our community. Place within us the desire that all come unto the knowledge of Christ as their Lord and Savior.

We need God to place within us also a desire for His Son Jesus Christ, who is our only eternal Hope and Savior. We need a renewed recognition that we are as filthy rags and we worship a righteous and Holy God. We need to come to recognize that it is God who is molding and shaping us, just as the Potter molds the clay.

### Psalm 80 – O Shepherd Lead Us

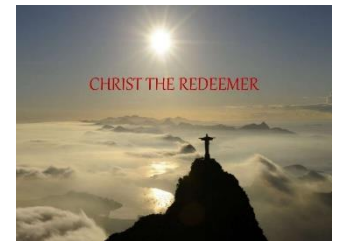
The Litany that we read this morning reminds us that we are like sheep in need of God to come and lead us. As we sang, “*O Come, O Come, Emanuel,*” we were reminded of Israel’s expectation of a coming redeemer – One that would restore the nation to glory once again –



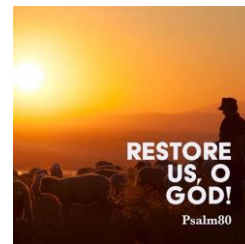
One that would ransom the captives of sin and disperse the gloomy clouds of night.

Israel’s plea for redemption should also be ours. All of life seems to be caught between the now and not yet. We live in the past, present, and the future all at the same time. Sometimes our past overwhelms our present and our future. Sometimes our present is impacted by our past and clouds our future. But the yearning of our heart should be one of anticipation and hope for the future.

Israel was hoping for a Redeemer to come and free them from their present despair. When the Messiah came lying in a manger with parents of lowly status, He was rejected by the very ones (the people of Israel) He had come to redeem. They were blinded by their preconceived ideas about what a Messiah should be that they rejected the One that came to suffer and die for them.



Today you and I stand on this side of the cross. The Christmas season recognizes the “now and not yet” feeling. We know that Christ has come to us; He has lived among us; and has died for us. But we also know that He is coming again one day to redeem us from this world of sin, strife, war, famine, sickness, and death. On this side of the cross, we can hope and anticipate His return. One day He will take His bride, the Church, to be with Him in eternity.



As we wait, the cry of David in Psalm 80 should be ours. “*Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved.*” (v. 19)



## I Corinthians 1:3-9 – Waiting for the Revelation

**Shag Carlyle** read to us a passage from I Corinthians concerning how we should live our lives as we await the revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul is writing to the church in Corinth to address many of the problems they are facing as they define themselves as believers in Jesus Christ.

Paul opens by extending “*grace and peace*” to the believers there in that church. I believe these are two items that God wants each group of believers to exercise in their midst. We need to give grace to one another liberally. Sometimes we say things we should not say, or do things we didn’t really mean to do. This occurs in our families and in our churches. We need to extend grace and forgiveness to one another. When this is done in a spirit of love and Christ-likeness, then peace will settle in a family and a church.



In addition to grace and peace, Paul desires that the people of God have all the gifts necessary to minister in Jesus’ name. He said, “*so that you come short in no gift.*” In the Book of Romans, we see that God has given various gifts to the church for the work and ministry God desired accomplished. As we yield ourselves to God, He liberally gives to us what He deems best.

In the exercising of our gifts, we also need to keep an eye on the end. When you go to work you use your skill and talents for the task at hand. But at the same time, you are keeping an eye on the clock. If you work from 8:00 to 5:00, then you internally know when 5:00 comes. You can feel

and anticipate quitting time. If you are a student or a teacher, you are busy all day, but when 3:00 comes, you are ready to go.

Paul identifies with this kind of anticipation by saying, “*eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” We need God to instill in us that anticipation once again.



As we live out our lives in faithfulness, exercising our gifts, anticipating His return, living in community and fellowship, practicing grace, experiencing peace, let us be found blameless until the day of Christ’s return.

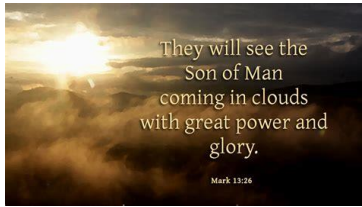
## Mark 13:24-37 – Watching for Christ’s Return



**Sharon Dew** read the passage of scripture from Mark which tells us that Christ will return one day. There are so many today that are consumed by the events that will occur when Christ returns. A few

years ago, Timothy LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins published a popular series titled, “*Left Behind.*” Their success in this area of end time theology (eschatology) enabled them to write over twelve books in the series. Their books have inspired several movies based on the books. David Jeremiah wrote a book about ten years ago called “*The Coming Economic Armageddon.*” This book is his view of how our world is changing into a New Global Economy.

All of us want to know what will happen in the future. We spend a great deal of energy trying to figure out if it is going to rain tomorrow or if it will be sunny. We sit up late to hear if it will be freezing the next day or if we will be experiencing “unseasonable warming for this time of the year.” By nature, we are curious about the future.



That is why Jesus gave us some clear advice about trying to prepare for Christ’s return. Jesus said, “*in those days, after the tribulation, the sun will be*

*darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of heaven.*”

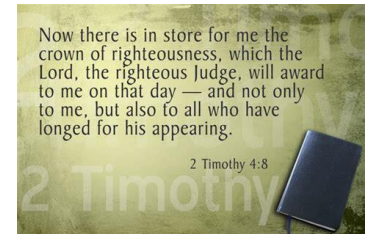
It is a magnificent unfolding of events that Jesus foretold. But He warned us that “*no one knows the hour or the day, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*” If Jesus doesn’t even know the time of His return, then why do so many Christian groups attempt to claim they have the “right” information as to when He would return? The primary admonition from Jesus was not to be concerned as to when, but rather we are to be prepared for whenever!

In several parables Jesus reminded the disciples that they were to live their lives prepared to meet God. Jesus may delay and come next week or next year. Let me remind you, there is nothing else left to be done on the prophetic calendar before Christ is to return. God is simply delaying

for His own reasons, for His own purpose. It could be He is waiting for a few more to enter into the kingdom of God.

None of us realistically know when our last day on earth will be. We may live one more day or we may live more ten years. I know we do not need to put off our preparation for the future. Once you are prepared, then you will no longer be fretfully concerned about how and when God rolls up the fabric of time.

Once we are prepared, we are instructed to watch and wait. II Timothy 4:8 tells us that there will be a “*crown of righteousness laid up for those who have loved His appearing.*”



God has promised to us that He will come again one day. He came once as a babe in Bethlehem. After thirty-three years, He died a cruel death on a cross outside Jerusalem. Three days later, He was victorious over death and rose from that grave. Forty days later, after giving instructions to His disciples and followers, He returned to heaven where He continues to intercede for us to His Heavenly Father. Jesus told us to watch and wait for his return. One day He will return as the **King of Kings and Lord of Lords** to rule and reign over His creation. For now, we celebrate His first Advent.



Eugene Peterson, who gave us the Message translation of the Bible, has an interesting thought on the difference between “wishing” and “hoping.”<sup>2</sup>

Eugene Peterson points out that what a lot of people call hope is in reality something different. It's wishing, not hoping; and wishing and hoping are not the same thing.



"Wishing," Peterson says, "is something all of us do. It projects what we want or think we need into the future. Just because we wish for something good or holy we think it qualifies as hope. It does not. Wishing extends our egos into the future; hope grows out of our faith. Hope is oriented toward what God is doing; wishing is oriented toward what we are doing."

Peterson goes on to say that we can picture wishing as though it were a line coming out from us with an arrow on the end, pointing into the future, pointing toward that thing we most want to possess. Hope is just the opposite. It's a line that comes from God out of the future, with its arrow pointing toward us.

"Hope," he continues, "means being surprised, because we don't know what is best for us or how our lives are going to be completed. To cultivate hope is to suppress wishing -- to refuse to fantasize about what we want, but live in anticipation of what God is going to do next."



As we think about Christmas this year, we need to realize God has sent us the thing we needed most – a baby in a manger, filled with self-giving love. Some people reject the gift as if it is nothing. The angel told Mary that His name was to be Immanuel, which literally means, “*God is with us.*” We have received a gift from above – and that gift is Jesus. We have been promised that He will come once again to claim those that love Him and anticipate His appearing.

As we enter this Advent season, may our Expectation and Hope be found only in Immanuel.

### **LET US PRAY**

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>Mikey’s Funnies, A Gym Funny, Nov. 19, 2019

<sup>2</sup>(Living the Message: Daily Help for Living the God-Centered Life), (HomileticsOnline.com, 11/27/11, illustration for Psalm 85), Sermon Central, accessed 11/28/2014

