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Advent I
1 December 2013
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Romans 13.8-14

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

One of the best things about being a Lutheran is the Church year.
We're in Advent now, and then comes Christmass.

There's a rhythm to the Church year.
Christmas and Easter are certainly highs; Advent and Lent are a bit lower.
And Holy Week, one of the most powerful weeks of the Church's life, is lowest of all.

Certain days are so chock-full of joy, we can hardly contain ourselves.
Other days make dirges appealing.

And that's the way it should be.

To not have the Church year is like not having the seasons.
We need the winter depression, and hopeful spring, the sweltering summer, and the beauty of fall.
These seasons bring with them a whole spectrum of emotion.
And so does the Church year.

Christmas is coming.
But just like any big event or important guest, there's plenty that needs getting ready.
That's what Advent's all about.
It's the season of getting ready.

You all know that the Church gets ready for Christmas in a much different way than the world.
The world's readiness includes shopping lists, Mall Santas, and eggnog.
There's a frenzy about making Christmas perfect.
About getting the right gift.
About decorating the house just right—even making sure it smells like Christmas.
It includes ugly sweater contests and cheesy Christmas carols like "Feliz Navidad."
The world chases after nostalgia, after a Christmas of its own making.

The Church's preparations are different.
Sure, she changes the colors from the long season of green to the hopeful advent blue.
She brings out more candles, to remind her that in the darkness Christ is the light of the world.
But her real preparation is in her repentance.

Advent gets us ready for the Coming Christ.
Sure, that includes our remembrance of the Christmas Feast—
of the baby Jesus lying in the manger, with angels and shepherds all around.

But first and foremost, it means the coming of Christ in judgment.
Just as we confess in the Nicene Creed:
"And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead."

This isn't to take away from Christmas,
but to help us better understand why we celebrate it every year.

The Church Year isn't for us to "play church."
It's there to preach Christ.
In advent, the Church preaches Christ by warning us of His coming.

In our Epistle today St. Paul says,
*"Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.
For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.
The night is far gone; the day is at hand.
So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.
Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness,
not in sexual immorality and sensuality,
not in quarreling and jealousy.
But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh,
to gratify its desires."* (Rom 13:11-14)

Advent says, "Wake up! It's time! Christ is coming! Repent."
Stop with the pornography.
Don't pour yourself another drink.
It's not okay to live together apart from marriage.
Stop your fighting.
There's no time for that.

We've got to get ready.
We've got to set aside what feels good or makes us happy for the moment;
and cling to what is eternal.

And that's Christ.
He is the image of God's love for us.

Earlier in our epistle he says,
*"Owe no one anything, except to love each other,
for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.
For the commandments....are summed up in this word:
'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
Love does no wrong to a neighbor;
therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."* (Rom 13:8-10)

When we look at ourselves—
at our lust and greed and anger and jealousy—
then we see our need for love.

But God showed His love for us in this:
that He gave His only begotten son for us.

That's love.

Love caused His incarnation in Mary's womb.

Love healed the lame and cured the lepers and fed the hungry and gave hope to the depressed.

Love sat on a donkey, making His way into Jerusalem in order to give His life for His neighbor.

That's the love we need.

And that's why Advent is here—

to prepare the way of the Lord;

to announce His coming;

to renounce the flesh and its sinful desires;

and to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're most ready for Christmas when we confess our sins and cling to Jesus.

If the tree doesn't get decorated this year,

or if you don't have enough to buy presents,

or if you want to burn every Christmas song written after 1960,

that's alright.

Christmas is most Christmass,

when it's about Jesus coming for you.

That's why the wisemen followed the star;

that's why the crowds shouted their Hosannas;

and that's why we gather around the preaching of the Gospel and this blessed Sacrament—

for here Jesus comes to us.

And He comes in love.

Because that's what you need.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit