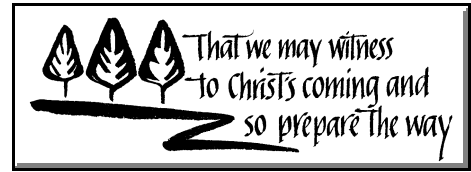


“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths”
(Isaiah 40:3)



Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This weekend we begin the season of Advent with the above words from the prophet Isaiah, which call us to be prepared and to make ready. Watchfulness, preparation, promise, and fulfilment all characterize the Advent season. Through these themes, we prepare ourselves, our families, our homes, and our parish community for a genuine celebration of Jesus' birth. However, Advent is about so much more than just the birth of a baby in Bethlehem. Advent calls us to celebrate God's love for us made manifest in so many ways: in a manger, on a cross, in an empty tomb, and in clouds of glory.

Christ has come; Christ will come again; Christ is here with us. Our celebration of Advent expresses through Scripture, ritual, and prayer these three stages of the salvation story. As the next four weeks unfold, we remember and reflect on Jesus' birth; we anticipate His return; and we celebrate His presence in our lives each and everyday. It is the whole story of salvation—God forgiving us, empowering us, equipping us, and restoring us—that we celebrate, and which invests Advent and Christmas with its rich and abiding meaning.

However, there is a tendency this time of year to get caught up in the “Christmas Machine” and to rush through Advent to Bethlehem. Pastor and theologian, Henry Nouwen writes; “Once I am truly convinced that preparing the heart is more important than preparing the Christmas tree, I will be a lot less frustrated at the end of the day.” This is good advice for us as we begin the “Christmas Countdown!”

So, how do we prepare our hearts and not just our homes over the next four weeks? Our church community—its worship and ministry—is the best place to start. Our common life—with its rhythm of Word and sacrament—celebrates the good news of the season. And I invite you to participate as fully as possible in our Advent and Christmas program and worship. Another practical way is more personal and can be practised any time of the day: personal prayer, reflection, and the study of God's Word. I commend to you the Advent calendar of daily scripture readings on the reverse side of this letter to help you in your preparation.

Jesus' advent into the world—past, present, and future—was not and is not intended to simply brighten our Decembers, but rather to transform our lives. As you journey through Advent, I hope and pray that you take the time to truly prepare your heart for this miraculous and wonderful truth, and to join your voice with that of the Apostle Paul and Christians throughout the ages in proclaiming; “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Kathy, Jonah, Gracie, Annie, and I wish you and your family a blessed Advent and joy-filled Christmas!

Maran Atha: Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

The Rev. Christopher R. Doering
Lead Pastor & Rector
crd3@live.ca

