

First Sunday of Advent – Hope: Today begins the season of Advent—a season the Christian Church has marked for centuries in anticipation of Christ’s coming at Christmas. Advent is a word that literally means to arrive or to come and the season of Advent is an annual 4-week Christian journey of discipleship by remembrance we take leading to Christmas. We anticipate the gift of Christmas with hope-filled remembrance of Christ’s first coming in Bethlehem and hope-filled preparation for Christ’s second coming at the end of time when all will be set right and God’s Kingdom will come fully on earth, just as it is in heaven. We remember with hope-filled thanksgiving that God Incarnate has come to us in Bethlehem (Emmanuel—God with us); we live presently, daily opening our lives to Christ’s hope-filled redemption; and we work and live towards a hope-filled future, anticipating Christ culmination of time and the eternal reign of God’s Kingdom in its fulness.

“Today we light the first candle of the Advent wreath. This first candle represents HOPE.”

Romans 15:13: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless
sleep, the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the
years are met in thee tonight.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel!

Devotion:

“For Christians, hope is ultimately hope in Christ. The hope that he really is what for centuries we have been claiming he is. The hope that despite the fact that sin and death still rule the world, he somehow conquered them. The hope that in him and through him all of us stand a chance of somehow conquering them too. The hope that at some unforeseeable time and in some unimaginable way he will return with healing in his wings.

No one in the New Testament calls a spade a spade as unflinchingly as Saint Paul. ‘If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile,’ he wrote to the Corinthians. ‘If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied’ (1 Corinthians 15:17, 19). That is the possibility in spite of which Saint Paul and the rest of us go on hoping even so.”

“[Jesus died on the cross], and what emerged from his death was a kind of way, of truth, of life, without which the last two thousand years of human history would be even more tragic than they are. A six-pointed star, a crescent moon, a lotus—the symbols of other religions suggest beauty and light. The symbol of Christianity is an instrument of death. It suggests, at the very least, hope.” (Excerpted from Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1993, pp. 21, 46-47.)

Reflect or Discuss:

1. What do you hope for in the coming year?
2. What impact do you hope your life can make on our world?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I like the idea of overflowing with hope, but many days, my reservoir gets awfully low. In this Advent season, keep me connected to your gift of hope. Amen.

“Do You Hear What I Hear”

Said the night wind to the little lamb,
Do you see what I see?
Way up in the sky, little lamb,
Do you see what I see?
A star, a star, dancing in the night
With a tail as big as a kite,
With a tail as big as a kite.

Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy,
Do you hear what I hear?
Ringin' through the sky, shepherd boy,
Do you hear what I hear?
A song, a song high above the trees
With a voice as big as the sea,
With a voice as big as the sea.

Said the shepherd boy to the mighty
king,
Do you know what I know?
In your palace warm, mighty king,
Do you know what I know?
A Child, a Child shivers in the cold
Let us bring him silver and gold,
Let us bring him silver and gold.

Said the king to the people everywhere,
Listen to what I say!
Pray for peace, people, everywhere,
Listen to what I say!
The Child, the Child sleeping in the night
He will bring us goodness and light,
He will bring us goodness and light.

“Away in a Manger”

Away in a manger,
no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus
laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky
looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus,
asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing,
the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus,
no crying he makes;
I love thee, Lord Jesus,
look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle
till morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus,
I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever,
and love me, I pray;
Bless all the dear children
in thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven
to live with thee there.