

The Advents of Christ

Christ's Entrance

Selected Texts

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Christ's Entrance

Scripture

Today is the First Sunday of Advent in 2020.

“Advent” (from the Latin *adventus*) means “coming,” and it refers to the season immediately before Christmas.¹

In an article for *Christian History* magazine, Elesha Coffman offers a fascinating history of Advent and Christmas traditions. She writes:

The first church official to propose special activities for the pre-Christmas period was Perpetuus, bishop of Tours, in 490. To help his flock prepare for the holiday, he advocated fasting every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from Martinmas (November 11) to Christmas Eve. This practice, which mirrored Lent, spread slowly throughout France, Spain, and Germany. Then it crashed into Rome.

Roman attention to the Advent season trailed Perpetuus by about 100 years, and it took a radically different tone. While much of Western Europe, and at least portions of the Christian East, fasted, Roman Christians celebrated. Perhaps it seemed odd to them to approach Christ's birth as somberly as they did his death. By the eleventh century, though, Rome had come around, and Advent meant no feasts, no recreational travel, no marital relations, and no weddings. (These prohibitions were dropped in recent centuries.)

Sometime in all of this, the start date for Western Advent slid back two weeks, to the Sunday closest to St. Andrew's Day (November 30). As a result, Advent can last anywhere from 22 to 28 days, though for the sake of year-to-year consistency, Advent calendars start with December 1. Yet not everyone kicks off the Christmas season at the same time or in the same way.

In the Orthodox Church, Advent still includes fasting, and

¹ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20–21.

in most places it lasts from November 15 to December 24. The Armenian Orthodox Church is an exception; its members fast for three of the seven weeks between November 15 (St. Philip's Day) and January 6 (Epiphany).

St. Barbara's Day, December 4, signals the beginning of the Christmas season in Syria, Lebanon, and parts of France and Germany. Some Middle Eastern customs for the day resemble American Halloween—children dress up in frightening costumes and go door-to-door collecting candy and other small gifts. This activity has no relationship to the story of St. Barbara, which states that her father locked her in a tower, killed her for her Christian faith, and was then struck by lightning. Not that it matters; historians now doubt that St. Barbara even existed.

St. Nicholas's Day, December 6, inaugurates the Christmas festivities in Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, and parts of Germany. On the night of December 5, St. Nicholas—accompanied, oddly enough, by a little demon—brings gifts for good children, who set out shoes or stockings for him to fill. The Dutch make the biggest production of Nick's arrival, gathering to watch his ship land in Amsterdam, then seeing him off on his flying, white horse. Obviously, a lot of this pageantry crossed over to America, except that our St. Nicholas arrives via the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and doesn't deliver his gifts until December 24.

Swedes wait until St. Lucy's Day, December 13, to commence Christmas observances. Lucy, who supposedly died in Italy in 304, became a Scandinavian favorite when that region converted to Christianity, beginning in about the eleventh century. Lucy's name comes from the Latin word for "light," but, before sixteenth-century calendar reforms, her feast day fell on December 21—the shortest day of the year. Scandinavians were pretty desperate for light around that time, so they latched onto Lucy. Her annual remembrance involves a girl from each household wearing a wreath of lingonberry leaves and lit candles on her head and making an early breakfast for the family.²

² See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/december/5121508.html>.

The Advents of Christ

Most families have Christmas traditions, and many families also have Advent traditions. It is the time of the year in which we begin to think about the birth, the first advent, of Christ.

I would like us to consider the advents of Christ, and today I would like to examine the entrance of Christ.

Let us read Deuteronomy 18:15-19:

¹⁵ “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— ¹⁶ just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ ¹⁷ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.’ ” (Deuteronomy 18:15-19)

Introduction

The early Christians developed the “church year” or “Christian calendar” as a way of learning about the birth, life, death, resurrection, and return of Christ throughout the year. So, the church year begins with Advent, then it moves on to Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Passion Week, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, and so on.

The “first advent” looks back to Christ’s first coming. The “second advent” looks forward to Christ’s second coming. We live between these two advents.

This year I would like to explore the advents of Christ in a sermon series I am calling “The Advents of Christ.”

First, I would like to examine “Christ’s Entrance.” His first

advent was prophesied, and he came almost 2,000 years ago (Deuteronomy 18:18-19; Isaiah 7:14). His second advent is also prophesied, and he will come at some time in the future (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Second, I would like to look at “Christ’s Timing.” His first advent was at a time predicted (Daniel 9:25). His second advent will be at a time that is unknown (Matthew 24:36).

Third, I would like to explore “Christ’s Appearance.” When he came the first time, he came as a man (Philippians 2:5-8). And when he comes the second time, he will come as God (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Fourth, I would like to look at “Christ’s Arrival.” His first advent was announced (Luke 2:10-14). When he comes the second time, he will come unannounced, as a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

And finally, I would like to examine “Christ’s Purpose.” Christ’s first advent was to save the lost (Luke 19:10). His second advent, however, will be to judge the lost (Matthew 25:31-33, 41-46).

Many of us are familiar with Christ’s first advent. We are familiar with the events surrounding his birth because it has already taken place. But we may not be as familiar with Christ’s second advent because it has yet to take place. I hope that we will learn more about his second advent and have a greater anticipation for it, so that we can say with the Apostle John, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

Lesson

In today’s lesson, we learn about Christ’s entrance for his first and second advents.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Christ’s Entrance for His First Advent
2. Christ’s Entrance for His Second Advent

I. Christ's Entrance for His First Advent

First, let's look at Christ's entrance for his first advent.

Christ's first advent was prophesied throughout the Scriptures. Let us look at just a few selected texts.

After Adam fell into sin in the Garden of Eden, the Lord God said to the serpent, in Genesis 3:14–15, **“Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”** God pronounced his immediate judgment on the serpent: he would be cursed. But God also promised a savior for mankind when he said that the woman's offspring would bruise the serpent's head. This is known as the “protoevangelium,” that is, the “first gospel.”

Adam's family grew and he had numerous descendants. By the time of Noah, however, “the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11). Things were so dreadful that God determined to make an end of all flesh. So, he commanded Noah to make an ark of gopher wood. God then destroyed all people (except for Noah, his three sons, and their wives) through a world-wide flood.

Noah's descendants became numerous. After the tower of Babel, “the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city” (Genesis 11:8).

Then God called a man named Abram. The Lord said to Abram, **“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those**

who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1–3). So, God’s blessing to all the families of the earth would come through Abram, through one of his descendants.

God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, and he had a son named Isaac. Isaac had twin sons named Esau and Jacob. God’s promise was to go through Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel. Because of famine, Jacob and his eleven sons were rescued by his son Joseph, who was Prime Minister of Egypt. So, the entire family lived in Egypt.

Four centuries later, the people of Israel in Egypt were numerous once again. Pharaoh became afraid of the Israelites and treated them brutally as slaves. God raised up from the Israelites a baby who was named “Moses” by Pharaoh’s daughter, who brought him up. Eventually God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt back to the Promised Land. God promised his people Israel a new prophet who would be like Moses. He said to Moses, **“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him”** (Deuteronomy 18:18-19).

One of Abraham’s descendants was King David, whose life we have been studying this past year. God made a covenant with David. It was an incredible promise, in which God said, **“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever”** (2 Samuel 7:12–13). God promised that one of David’s offspring would be king of an everlasting kingdom.

More than two centuries after the death of David, God raised

up the Prophet Isaiah. He ministered in a time of great nation difficulty. King Ahaz was king of Judah at the time. The Lord said to him in Isaiah 7:14, **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”**

This prophecy came to fulfillment with the birth of Jesus Christ, as we read in Matthew 1:18-25:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Josh Mc Dowell, in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, writes, “Canon Liddon is authority for the statement that there are in the Old Testament 332 distinct predictions which were literally fulfilled in Christ.”³ Every single prophecy about Christ’s entrance for his first advent came true.

³ Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017).

II. Christ's Entrance for His Second Advent

Second, let's look at Christ's entrance for his second advent. During Christ's last supper with his disciples, he inaugurated what came to be known as the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He spent time teaching and encouraging his disciples because the next day he was to be crucified. And, of course, we know that three days later he was resurrected back to life, but at that moment the disciples did not know that. In order to encourage their sorrowful hearts, Christ said, in John 14:1-3, **"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."** Christ wanted to assure his troubled disciples that one day he will come again and take his disciples to himself.

Three days after his crucifixion and burial, Jesus was resurrected back to life again. He then spent forty days teaching his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. On the day of his ascension, he once again exhorted his followers to make disciples by saying, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, **"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven"** (Acts 1:8–11).

About twenty years after Jesus' ascension to his Father's right

hand in heaven, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica. There was some confusion about when Jesus would return. Moreover, there was also confusion about Christians who had already died. So, Paul wrote to clarify what happens to those who die as Christians and also about the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18,

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

There are numerous prophecies regarding the entrance of Christ for his second advent. Admittedly, there are not nearly as many as there were for his first advent. But they will also all be fulfilled.

Conclusion

Therefore, having examined Christ's entrance for his first and second advents, let us be prepared for Christ's entrance at his second advent.

The Italians have a legend about a woman named Befana who lived along the dusty road that led to Bethlehem. She was her village's best housekeeper. Meticulous. Which was no small task

with all that dust. Late one night there was a knock at the door and she opened it to find three kings in search of the baby born to be King of the Jews, the Prince of Peace. Frankly, what she also saw was all the dust that blew in and the dirt on their boots and clothes.

They asked to rest awhile and invited her to join them on their journey. She said she'd love to do that but she had to get the house back in order after they left, and there was a load of laundry to be done. "Let me finish up," she said, "then I'll be right behind you." They told her all she had to do was follow the star.

She worked all night and finally, near dawn, she put on her heavy cloak. She took a little straw doll she wanted to give to the baby, and left her house—spic and span. But the sky had clouded over and she couldn't see the star. It began to rain and her little doll was ruined. Finally, she gave up and went home. "I'm a foolish old woman," she said to herself. "I missed my chance to worship the newborn Prince of Peace. Perhaps I will find him someday."

So the legend is that each year she sets out with a bag of toys, leaving some at every house where there is a child, in hopes one of them might be the Child she missed.⁴

That story is of course a legend. But we must not miss the point of the legend, and that is to be prepared for the advent of Christ. One day, and it may be very soon, Christ is coming back again. The question we must each answer is this: *Am I ready for the second advent of Christ?*

You may ask, "How may I be ready for the second advent of Christ?" It is very simple. Repent of your sin. And believe that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of sinners. Amen.

⁴ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2019/november/woman-who-was-too-busy-for-christmas.html>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
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