

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2020
SERMON: "LIGHT AT THE END..." ISAIAH 9:2-7
1ST ADVENT

It is amazing how fast time is flying by. Given the extraordinary nature of 2020, perhaps it is a good thing. Perhaps you are wondering about 2021 and will there be hope on the horizon.

Waiting...we are waiting for our Amazon purchases, we are waiting for a vaccine. We are waiting for the borders to open and we are waiting for things to return to normal. We spend a lot of time waiting...

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. You may be familiar with the celebration of Advent or you may not. As a child, I can't remember celebrating Advent. To be honest, I am not sure when my first memories of wreathes, candles, and special readings would be. Certainly, by college I was participating in Advent services.

So what is Advent and why do we celebrate it?

Let's begin answering these questions with our Scripture reading which is found in the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah 9:2-7:

**² The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.**

**³ You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.**

⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat,

**you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.**

**⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.**

**⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.**

**And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

**⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.**

**He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.**

**The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.**

WHAT IS ADVENT?

On a basic level, Advent is the four Sundays leading up to Christmas. It begins this year today, Sunday, November 29th and continues until Christmas Eve, the 24th of December. Many people have come to understand this time as a time of preparing ourselves spiritually as we "wait" for the birth of Jesus. This is part of Advent but there is more.

We get the word “Advent” from the Latin word “Adventus” meaning “coming.” The Latin is a translation of the Greek word “Parousia” which means coming and is usually applied to the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus.

During the 4th and 5th century, Advent was the time when new converts would prepare for their baptism during the Feast of the Epiphany in January which celebrated God becoming human (the incarnation) represented by the gifts given by the Magi or Wisemen, it also celebrates Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist and Jesus’ first miracle at the wedding in Cana.

Originally the Advent season was a 40 day period of fasting, penance, and prayers as the convert readied themselves to join the body of Christ. In reality, very little of Advent had to do with Christmas! By the 6th century, Roman Christians tied Advent to the coming of Jesus – not in a manger – but Jesus’ 2nd coming.

WAITING...

Today our Scripture reading is just as relevant to today as it was in Isaiah’s time. Both Christians and non-Christians are waiting on a divine, cosmic level. Waiting to see how life plays out. As Christians, we have a message that will encourage and calm the anxious souls of the world who are searching for truth. Our Advent symbols can help us encourage one another and even share the truth of Jesus with those around us. We are surrounded by a world, a people, walking in darkness searching for a great light!

The wreath, often evergreen, represents everlasting life offered as a free gift to all who will believe and trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, life found in the cold of winter of our lives. It is appropriate to decorate with holly berries and pinecones. The red of the berries remind of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and pinecones are considered the new life that Jesus brings by rising again on the 3rd day.

The three blue and one pink candle (colours may vary) generally represent hope, faith, joy, and peace. Why is there a pink candle? The pink candle represents rejoicing and signifies a shift in thought. The first two candles focus on the 2nd coming of Christ and the second two candles focus on the nativity. Finally we

light the Christ Candle. We are reminded of all that the Messiah represents and is to us. He is the Wonderful Counsellor, mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. We celebrate His love shown to us by His willingness to “become flesh and dwell among us...and we celebrate the His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

WHEN GOD WAITS...

Did you know that God also waits? He is waiting on His loved creation to recognize him and come running to him. He is waiting to be a Father to the fatherless. He is waiting for just the right time to send Jesus back to earth. Why is God waiting? 2 Peter 3:9 tells us:

⁹ The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.

God loves us! How His heart must break when one that He created decides to reject His love. In 1 Timothy 2, we are told to pray for all people because:

³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

OUR RESPONSE TO ADVENT

I want to challenge you this year to respond to the season of Advent and use the time of waiting to search your hearts and respond to Jesus in a fresh way. The pandemic has slowed much of life down, have you taken time to slow down and spend time with Jesus. Advent reminds us to wait, to expect, appreciate, and love. Reflect what it means that Jesus is coming again. Do some soul searching and make sure you are ready to meet Jesus. Do you need to fix your relationship with God? Ask Him for forgiveness and ask

that you will have a renewed sense of hope. May we focus on the Christ, the one who came to set us free. We can rest assured, reminded that God waits for us and wants a relationship where he calls us His children. May we be caught up in the love of God that came down that first Christmas and may we focus on our relationship with Him rather than the trappings of the season.

May we be reminded that God desires a relationship with His children and that it all comes about from His love towards us. As Isaiah reminded us, it all happens because:

**...The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this. (Is. 9:7)**

Let's pray...