



**Introduction**

*Advent is about the “coming days.” God’s people have always lived in great expectation, but that expectation finds specific, repeated enunciation in the texts appointed for these four weeks. The ancients anticipated a “righteous Branch to spring up for David.” The Thessalonians awaited “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints.” Jesus’ contemporaries hoped for the time “to stand before the Son of Man.” With them we eagerly await the coming days: another Christmas celebration, a second coming, and the advent of Christ in word and supper.*

**Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, who alone does wonders, who lifts up the lowly, who fills the hungry with good things. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin, trusting in the tender mercy of our God.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

God for whom we wait,  
**in the presence of one another,  
we confess our sin before you.  
We fail in believing that your good news is for us.  
We falter in our call to tend your creation.  
We find our sense of self in material wealth.  
We fear those different from ourselves.  
We forget that we are your children  
and turn away from your love.  
Forgive us, Blessed One,  
and assure us again of your saving grace. Amen.**

God, in Christ Jesus, has looked with favor upon you!  
Through the power of the Holy Spirit, † your sins are forgiven.  
You are children of the Most High,  
inheritors of the eternal promise, and recipients of divine mercy.  
God strengthens you anew to follow the way of peace. **Amen.**

**Opening Hymn ELW # 257 / LBW # 34 (vs 1-2)**

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

## Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection alert us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and redeem us for your life of justice, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

*In the Old Testament, “righteousness” often has to do with being faithful in relationship. God acts righteously both in punishing Israel for its sin and in having mercy. In today’s reading, Jerusalem’s future name—“The LORD is our righteousness”—proclaims that God is even now working salvation for Israel.*

*Read the complete text [here](#).*

## Psalm: Psalm 25:1-10

<sup>1</sup>To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

<sup>2</sup>**My God, I put my trust in you; let me not be put to shame,  
nor let my enemies triumph over me.**

<sup>3</sup>Let none who look to you be put to shame;  
rather let those be put to shame who are treacherous.

<sup>4</sup>**Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths.**

<sup>5</sup>Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation;  
in you have I trusted all the day long.

<sup>6</sup>**Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love,  
for they are from everlasting.**

<sup>7</sup>Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;  
remember me according to your steadfast love  
and for the sake of your good-ness, O LORD.

<sup>8</sup>**You are gracious and upright, O LORD;  
therefore you teach sinners in your way.**

<sup>9</sup>You lead the lowly in justice and teach the lowly your way.

<sup>10</sup>**All your paths, O LORD, are steadfast love and faithfulness  
to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.**

## Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

*Upon Timothy’s report from the congregation at Thessalonica, Paul is exuberant with gratitude for them. In this passage from his letter, Paul voices overflowing thanks, joy, and blessings for the people of this growing church.*

*Read the complete text [here](#).*

## **Gospel: Luke 21:25-36**

*God will fulfill God's purposes and, already, hidden signs of that fulfillment abound. On that great day there will be dismay, perplexity, confusion, and terror, but God's people shall be given strength to stand boldly and receive God's promised redemption.*

*Read the complete text [here](#).*

## **Reflection on the Text**

*We Need a Little Christmas (from the show "Mame" by Jerry Herman)*

Haul out the holly, put up the tree before my spirit falls again, fill up the stocking  
I may be rushing things, but deck the halls again now.  
For we need a little Christmas right this very minute  
Candles in the window, carols at the spinet  
Yes, we need a little Christmas right this very minute  
Need a little Christmas NOW!!!

In the 1966 musical "Mame," that song is actually sung during a sweltering Georgia July! Mame has lost a fortune in the 1929 stock market crash, a brother in WWII, and a plantation owner husband in a tragic accident, leaving her desperately grasping for some elusive joy. So, haul out the holly! Because we need Christmas, right this very minute!

But don't let the song's peppy tune fool you. Listen to Mame's angst: "Because I've grown a little leaner, grown a little colder, grown a little sadder, grown a little older, and I need a little angel sitting on my shoulder. Need a little Christmas now!" That one little three-letter word could sum up our culture.

"Now!" We want what we want, feel entitled to what we want, when we want it, which is NOW! By some deceit or trickery this year, Black Friday was the whole month of November, because no matter how early something starts, we have this instant gratification need for it to be quicker, sooner, and whatever the hot gadget is for this season, all I know is I have to have it first, post it first.

First out of the gate claims the day, controls the narrative. You wait, you are late. You snooze, you lose. Nope, the word is "Now!" National Debt, education debt, marketing in general in the Information Age are all about NOW. Real time. On demand.

And yeah, try 21 months into a pandemic to tell folks they need to wait yet a while longer to get back to normal – no masks, no distancing, no protocols, even if your reasoning includes, "People might die." Again, nope. Rather risk my health and yours than to wait on the all clear.

So much compelling power in that tiny word: NOW! The opposite of which is the nastiest 4-letter word imaginable, the dreaded W-A-I-T.

Waiting has no place in an instant gratification world. We are fulfillment people, no doubt about it, which makes the Advent wreath, these scripture lessons, this season as absurdly counter-intuitive and counter-cultural as it gets.

Ever congregation is convinced that if you Google the word “Grinch,” a Lutheran pastor’s picture will appear, because while parishioners prefer Christmas carols, warm fuzzies, and sweet little Jesus, we torture them every advent instead with judgment, John the Baptist, broods of vipers, and the cataclysmic end of the age!

Advent is about Christ’s coming, alright, but not so much the baby as the judge at the end of all time, for which the clarion call of the scriptures and the church is Watch! Wait! Prepare! Another seasonal tune applies: “You better watch out,” alright, but not because Santa Claus is coming to town. No, Jesus is coming and we’re to pay attention to the coming one’s promise to do justice, as Jeremiah says, so, as Paul admonishes the Thessalonians, that you may be blameless and holy when Jesus come. Frustrating words when we’re with Auntie Mame in wanting some fulfillment, some Christmas feel-good, right now!

Obviously, Christmas, God becoming one of us, is foundational and cause for celebration! And celebrate it we will! The challenge is our reticence or unwillingness to embrace the spiritual necessity of waiting patiently and preparing intentionally. Advent’s penitential purpose is to prepare us for the coming of Christ in much the same way that the penitential season of Lent prepares us for the joy of Easter. By waiting, hoping, and repenting.

Ricky Bobby in Talladega Nights prefers to pray to 6 lb. 8 oz. Baby Jesus because, he argues, “I like the Christmas Jesus best.” Who wouldn’t compared to the judge who comes at the end of time? But if he’s coming, how do we prepare? Much as we would in our own homes when we hear that “company’s coming!” By cleaning the house, getting things in order. Only in Advent the “house” is you, me.

Advent is a precious gift to the church, to us. In this liminal space of pandemic and between Christ’s coming once in Bethlehem and again at the end of all things. Feel-good contrivances simply can’t eliminate faithful watching, waiting, preparing. If fulfillment is all we’re about, then we lose hope itself. Advent teaches us, requires us to hope, and especially given the past 21 months, Lord knows we need hope when it feels like the rug is being yanked out from under us!

As we light the first Advent candle today, Advent lights a fire under us to wait, watch, repent, hope. So yes, we want a little Christmas – right is very minute.... But need a little Advent now! Amen.

**Hymn of the Day ELW # ELW # 248/WOV # 626**

*People Look East*

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

## **Nicene Creed**

*We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:*

**We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,**

of all that is, seen and unseen.  
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary  
and became truly human.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## Prayers of Intercession

In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God's presence.

### *A brief silence.*

God of presence and peace, strengthen your church around the globe to proclaim the message of your love coming to the world. Open our hearts to recognize your face in all people and in all of creation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of mighty redwoods and microscopic plants, fields and city parks, the wind and the waves, be a healing balm to our wounded planet. May we nurture what you have lovingly created. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of equity and compassion, bring righteousness and goodness to all peoples of the earth. Give a heart of discernment and integrity to leaders in our communities.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of comfort and care, be present with those who watch and wait. Come to all who await births, deaths, divorces, new unions, new jobs, retirements, healing, and life transitions of every kind, especially those we name now. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of promises kept and new dreams awakened, shelter your people from destructive storms. We pray for those whose lives have been upended by natural disasters, for the work of Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran World Relief, and other relief organizations. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

God of companionship and community, we give you thanks for the saints who journeyed with us and now abide in you. Even in distress and uncertainty, make us confident that your promises endure forever. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

## **Lord's Prayer**

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

**Closing Hymn ELW # 260/LBW # 33**

***The King Shall Come***

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

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Today's reflection was written by the Rev. Timothy Smith, Bishop of the NC Synod.