



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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Bishop's Advent Message Advent 2023

My dear Friends,

Well, the Christmas music has started up. You hear it in the stores where the shopkeepers are trying to get us in the Christmas mood of giving or, at least, buying. It is not that way in the Church, though. Instead of shiny, bright Christmas decorations, there is the sombre purple of Advent. In Advent, we refrain from singing "*Joy to the world*" with the cries, "*Lo, he comes with clouds descending.*"

The beginning of this holy time of Advent presents the opposite of the sweet Christmas sentiments. Advent begins not with cribs, shepherds, and "Silent Night" but with the prophecy that God will make a decisive intervention in human history. Look at one of the more intimidating passages in Scripture from the Gospel of Luke: "*There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*" (Luke 21:25-28)

Tough stuff. Not the stuff of Christmas Carols. But, again, this is the beginning of the Advent season, not Christmastime. Advent speaks about preparation for the two comings of Christ. The first coming of the Lord began in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. That journey continued to Jerusalem and Golgotha and an empty tomb. The Lord's second coming is at the end of time when Christ will judge those who have lived in love and light and those who have lived in darkness and hatred.

For us in North America, Advent occurs during the darkest times of the year when there is the least sunlight. The darkest day of the year comes towards the end of Advent on December 21st. But then, the reverse happens. Moving forward, we see more and more daylight overtaking the night. This should give us hope. Indeed, Advent is the season of hope because it reminds us that the dark time will end and that the light of Christ will triumph.

Hatred, discrimination, racism, abuse of all forms, broken relationships, and indifference to human suffering - these are part of the dark times of the world. As Church and individuals, we are called to work towards their downfall. The transformation of the world from hatred to love

is our work as Christians. The season of Advent reminds us of the work we must do all year long.

God will step in and re-create this world. God will put an end to the exploitation of the poor and powerless. God will overturn those who have turned the things of the world into their gods. God's presence will be known to those who think they have hidden themselves from wrath. We must stand straight and raise our heads, for our redemption is at hand. We are to pray for the strength to stand before the Son of Man.

The world of coldness, darkness and hatred is the world that Advent calls us to change. But, we have to begin with ourselves. Advent demands that we ask ourselves where darkness has a hold in our lives. We may have a hidden prejudice against a group of people. There may be a lingering resentment towards a former friend. As long as we allow the hate to remain within us, we allow darkness to overtake our lives.

We are called to be people of light. Indeed, we have to ask ourselves how we can bring light to those who are in darkness. We must "*cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.*" We need to do this for others as well as ourselves. We cannot allow past hurts and present prejudices to destroy our opportunity to bring light to those in darkness. We must let God's love shine through us.

This is the work of the Christian. This is the work of Advent. This is how we prepare the way for the Lord.

I conclude with the Collect for Advent:

**Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life
in which your Son Jesus Christ
came to us in great humility,
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge both the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.**

A blessed Advent,
In Christ,

† Samuel: Eastern Newfoundland; Labrador

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