

From The Pastor

With the light and truth of Christ our King still fresh in our minds, swelling our hearts with gratitude and strength, we are called to rejoice in the story that has brought us salvation. Everybody loves a good story, and the best stories are living and true stories that are still unfolding. Ours is a story that never gets old because the early chapters only serve to give insight and hope to the chapters yet to be written.

We know the early chapter of the story of our salvation. Year after year we hear of the faith, hope, and promise to which our ancestors clung as they prayed to God. Images are familiar, yet they do not fail to inspire because our hearts are also looking for the presence and action of the Lord in our lives. We too are looking to be saved from all that weighs us down.

Hope is essential to the human experience. People without hope are drawn to despair, surrendering a vitality of life that leaves them detached and letting go. We must have something to live for and to look forward too. Our lives are not without meaning or purpose. However dark and weary life may become, our purpose is clear and our hope secure in our deep identity in Christ.

Advent is a season of anticipation, spiritual renewal, and personal growth in the promises of the Lord Jesus. Because the Feast of Christmas is so essential and life changing for us and for the world, it calls for a season of preparation to ensure that we reverently and with great joy realize all that has come to us. The birth of Jesus is the revelation of a new light in the world that will dispel the darkness of our despair and give new vitality to our hope. A promise has been made to us, and the birth of this child is the beginning of its fulfillment.

So how do we prepare? The early chapters of the story are familiar to us, and are a consolation to hear. Yet, how might they stir us to a new hearing and acting in all they promise? Consoling as the words and images of Isaiah and others can be, we nonetheless must animate these images within our own lives. The season we celebrate is two-fold. It is already and not yet. We prepare our hearts to shake off any lethargy to celebrate with full joy the fact that our Savior has been born to us. At the same time, we are waiting for the fulfillment of his coming in glory. Do we not pray at each liturgy, 'as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.' Indeed we do, and Christ in his fullness is what we await.

As the season proclaims, what we await we already have. As we reflected last week on the Feast of Christ the King, our deepest identity is in Christ. We are not to be people who live on the surface of life, but those who know ourselves deeply in the love of our Creator and Savior. To know ourselves deeply is to know the presence of Christ within us. With this inner knowing, however distracted or disordered our life might be, we remain in the grip of divine grace, moving forward with hope and light.

Advent is a time to re-center ourselves in this inner self-knowing. How do you know Jesus? How does he know you? If you were to meet Jesus personally tomorrow, or even today, how would that be for you? Exciting, nerve racking, fearful, joyous, timid, or maybe naturally comfortable? The reality is that Jesus is present and available to each of us right now. Personal relationship is the best way to be with Jesus. That is how he is with us: real and personal. Beyond our prayers and religious practice, Jesus is a real person who seeks to know and love you personally. Stretch your understanding and openness of all that is possible in knowing Jesus.

When Jesus came into the world, everything changed. Human beings are famous for having set ideas and expectations of how things should be. Whether it is the old, 'we have always done it that way', or the staunch conviction that God can only act in a certain way, the reality is that God does not and will not fit into our human way of being. That is why Jesus caused such a stir in his birth, increasing with his public ministry, and culminating in his death. People don't like change, especially if it wasn't their idea, or to their liking.

The birth of Jesus brought a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting into the world. The divine way has been set forth, and those who seek it will gladly follow. Old ways can die hard, but for the living, it is the only way. Old ways become predictable and stale; ingrained habits of thinking and acting lose their ability to inspire. Jesus is a new way, and the Advent season gives us time to reset ourselves in the mind and heart of God who comes to us in Christ.

What do you want from Jesus? What do you expect from your faith? Name your desires and speak them to Jesus. This is the watching and urgent readiness that the gospel calls for. What are you willing to do to allow Jesus to speak to your heart and give you peace? Let us clear out the stale old ways and allow the new light of Jesus to show a new way.

Great job on the Thanksgiving Baskets! You did a wonderful work. Shall we do Christmas?

Father John Esper