

I Advent 2024

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Hymn 2 and Hymn 5 (H1940), The Collect, Romans 13.8-14, St. Matthew 21.1-13



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here; Until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel. Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Our Opening Hymn sets the tone for the commencement of the Advent Season and the New Church Year. Our Emmanuel...Our God With Us...is coming soon. We, the Church, is the Israel he will set free from the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadow. We need to get ready for him to enter our hearts, minds and souls.

If we turn our attention to the Advent Collect we get a clear picture of how we can get ready to receive Jesus. The Collect was composed for the *1549 Book of Common Prayer*. Bishop Matthew Wren, the uncle of Sir Christopher Wren, the great architect who designed Saint Paul's Cathedral after the Great London Fire of 1666 destroyed the original building, suggested the Collect be said every day during Advent until Christmas Day. The rubric...the italicized print under the Collect...was added in the *1662 Prayer Book*.

The Advent Collect is a CALL TO ACTION...to start putting into practice the spiritual resolutions we made on the Sunday Next Before Advent. The Collect compels us to cast off darkness and evil and embrace light and good; now in this lifetime when Jesus came to us as fragile flame of a baby boy; so we may ready to receive Jesus on the last day when he will come in glorious light and majesty to judge the living and the dead; and we may be raised to eternal life with him in heaven. Advent calls us to take action NOW...not later.

The Advent Collect talks about the four final things: death, judgment, heaven and hell:

- *Death---we don't like to think about...we have friends and family who have died...we will too some day...we can't avoid it*
- *Judgment---we will be judged by our actions now...they do speak louder than words...and they show the disposition of our hearts*
- *Heaven---is what the writer of Hebrews says we all hope for but have yet to experience*
- *Hell---is the alternative to heaven, for those who choose it*

In the Epistle, Saint Paul tells us the nighttime is over and to stop acting like people who are always asleep. It's daytime so we need to act like people who live in the Light of Christ and do our work honestly, not like people who sneak around at night hoping they can get away with doing bad things. Paul tells us everything we do must be motivated by love of others, because the "moment we will be saved is closer now than when we first believed." We want to be ready by putting on the "armor of light" the Collect talks about. Jesus is our armor; he is the Light that shines in the darkness that can never be extinguished.

While the Gospel appointed for the First Sunday of Advent might seem a strange choice...it's Matthew's account of Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday...it's actually the perfect choice. Jesus is making come true Zechariah's prophecy written 600 years before his birth..."Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion! Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem! Look your king is coming to you! He comes triumphant and victorious, but humble and riding on a donkey---on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Four hundred years later the prophet Malachi wrote..."Then the Lord you are looking for will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger you long for will come and proclaim my covenant."

King Jesus is not the kind of king the people expected and he is not the kind of king we expect to come and save us. Kings are born in beautiful and impressive castles. Kings ride on horses and have great armies. King Jesus comes to us first as the baby born in a barn. His ride into Jerusalem was on a donkey, the lowliest and most humble form of first century transportation. His army: a rag tag group of men and women. This is the King Jesus, the Messiah, we are getting ready to welcome on Christmas Day.

Our Closing Hymn tells the rest of the Advent story...the story about the Second Advent...the Second Coming of Jesus. It was for this reason our Emmanuel...God with us...came to us in the first place. It was for us...and that gives us every reason to rejoice.

*Lo! He comes with clouds descending, Once for our salvation slain:
Thousand, thousand saints attending, Swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia, alleluia! Christ the Lord returns to reign.*

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