



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

November 27, 2016

Introduction to the Word:



Advent is here and regardless of which church cycle we are in, the underlying theme is “*Prepare*.” This year we focus on Matthew’s Gospel and he takes up where Luke left off a few weeks ago in talking about being prepared, for God comes at unexpected times and in unexpected places. As the Gospel says, “If the master had known the hour of the night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake...”

We may be somewhat apprehensive in hearing those words, so how do we deal with that? Two ways: we *prepare* as this Advent season unfolds and we rely on **HOPE**. Hope is not this “looking at the world through rose-colored glasses” thing. Hope is tough stuff. It is not what our human nature typically defaults to when things are going wrong and the world seems to be crumbling around us. Hope requires an inner strength, a reliance on God, knowing his love for us will always get us through.

So as we travel towards Christmas over the next 4 weeks, let us take advantage of the time we have been given to *prepare* for the coming of Jesus. Our theme this year is “**Celebrate Differently**” and it is what we have to look forward to, what we **HOPE** for, not only this year on December 25th but every year until we see Christ face-to-face. Christ died and rose so we can have **HOPE** in the resurrection. **HOPE** is the gift we receive when we trust in God. **HOPE** can be ours this Christmas as part of “**The Greatest Gift**.”

Warm-Up:



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Advent is a “waiting time”, but many of us do not react well to waiting. You are invited to talk about your feelings related to “waiting.” What situations bug you the most in terms of waiting? *A long red light, Waiting for vacation time, Long line of traffic, Christmas, Calling Rogers, or Bell, or...*

CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

Leader: We wait in joyful hope for the *coming again* of Jesus Christ. He has promised to return in all His glory in order to lead us to share in the fullness of His own life so that we, in turn, may bring this life and light to our communities and our world.

Lord Jesus, you came to reveal to us the fullness of God’s love, **Lord, have mercy.**
Christ Jesus, our Emmanuel, God-with-us, God-for-us, **Christ, have mercy.**
Lord Jesus, our most certain way to the Father/Mother, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

FIRST READING (Isaiah 2:1–5)

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
In the days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (Romans 13:11–14)

Brothers and sisters, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the



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day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Matthew 24:37–44)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus spoke to his disciples: “As the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

“Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:

[You may also as a group wish to listen again to the Audio of the Lord's Day Message](#)

Advent comes to us yearly to challenge us to **wake up** from our lethargy and small-mindedness, into the great hopes which our faith offers us. This is why Advent really is a season, as the African hospital patient, to whom I became a visitor, mentioned in my homily reminded me of, **CALL AND RESPONSE**. That we become more attentive to His Call and Our Response.

In the **first reading, Isaiah**, even though a gifted and inspired poet, was also an eminently practical person. Israel was surrounded by great conquering forces, by voices willing to compromise morality, for the sake of the balance of power, and by all manner of political intrigue and dishonesty. Isaiah proclaims international **peace and well-being as the fruit of loyalty** to God's covenant. Mount Zion, the **mountain of the Lord's house**, is the centre of that peace because it is the **symbol and focal point of the divine covenant** that God made with Israel, as well as with all people and all nations.

‘Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up **to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God** of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths... the **mountain of the Lord's house** shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; **all the nations shall stream to it.**’ “The world for which Isaiah



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promises a lasting peace was the real world of his day as it is of our own. If peace and justice are not succeeding in our world, it is because our job is not yet finished, and our efforts have not yet been fully realized.

So we come into God's House and here we not only look but we seek to Listen to how God seeks to share His voice. To Learn how God teach us His ways, and ponder what God is asking of us in our lives. This listening then must lead to understanding – once again – a call and response.

St Paul in the second reading builds on this when he invites us to Live Honourably. Not that long ago, at a session, a very positive presentation was being made on the value of the common good. Four people of a group of fifteen or so, then began to raise petty issues which demeaned the presenter and even more so the common good. Not a soul stood up to the four. Even though it was obvious that what was being said was nothing more then self centered pettiness, no one encouraged a positive stance. This is an example of what happens when our passive nature, or our busy lives, take hold and we forget to live honourably. Ask yourself – do you stand up for the common good or do you pursue your group and your desires? Advent is a great time to celebrate differently and to hear God's call to the common good and respond!

Certainly the Gospel supports this as we are invited to “Keep Awake” or be alert for God's call and response in our lives. To be prepared, to be Active, to be Alert.

This Advent - may I suggest something which will help Celebrate Differently?

1. As an individual or as a family- define what your Advent is going to be about
2. Decide that this Advent - each candle that is lite will represent the decision for every day of that week - it will remind you of the number of people you must try and help in a small way - thru kind gesture or considerate word. For this week - everyday - at night ask yourself - Who Did I Help Today? And make sure each day there is one different name
3. Determine that this Advent you will not become distracted with the unnecessary things - but rather that you will be open to God's distractions - the people God puts in your path for you to respond to for the common good.

So this Advent – will you Celebrate Differently? Will you look for the moments to Praise the Lord, will you seek the times to pause and “Hmm”, will you decide on the moments to say Amen?

Amen????

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: (15-20 minutes)



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The Advent prophecies of Isaiah give us hope that history has a restart button and there is still time to find our way back to the land of harmony found in the common good not in personal pettiness.

- a) What do these words of Isaiah mean for you? Explain.
 - b) Isaiah envisions a world without conquest. What areas of your life would you change in such a world? (Think of personal grievances, racial or ethnic tensions, institutions with which you do battle.)
 - c) In what areas of your life are people most apt to still carry a sword or threaten with a spear? Share your thoughts.
- When was the last or a recent time you could feel God nudging or directing you towards a specific call? How did you respond? Read aloud Luke 1:38. Mary proclaims she is God's servant and will do whatever He wills. What are your reactions to this verse?

Intercessions:

Leader: Our response: Lord Hear us

For the Church, gathered in prayer during the holy season of Advent: may gratefulness and kindness be the guide posts of our journey of faith. We pray to the Lord.

For areas of the world in strife and seeking peace - recalling our mission work in Haiti, Kenya, Jerusalem: that one nation will not raise the sword against another, and that we in our actions and deeds, may be instruments of peace in our homes and in our heart. We pray to the Lord.

For each of us: that we may Celebrate Differently as a people of faith and be vigilant in waiting upon Christ who comes to bring us light, health and strength. We pray to the Lord.

In Thanksgiving for the Lord's continued blessing upon our parish community. As a Family of Faith, may we remain a place with something for everyone, with the Eucharist as the centre of our parish life. We pray to the Lord.

For our parish family: as we undertake a focus on kindness, may our hearts change in deed and action as we seek to help others through our Red Stocking appeal and Kindness Counts Campaign. We pray to the Lord.

For all who have died and await the kingdom, and for the intentions recorded in the Parish Book of Prayer. We pray to the Lord.

Leader: Let us seek the intercession of the Patroness of our Parish as we pray: **Hail Mary**



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Closing Activity and Prayer (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and “outreach” to the larger community.)

GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:

GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT

Please consider offering a **Holy Hour in our Adoration Chapel** – either as a group or individually – for the intentions of the parish common good and for the objectives of our pastoral priorities. Remember also our Pastor, our Pastoral Team.

GROUP ACTION:

- The Red Stocking Campaign and Kindness Counts Campaign are underway – how will your group be involved?
- Our Day of Mercy (all day confessions) is on December 15th from 8:30am-8:30pm. Twelve Hours, Twelve Confessors. Consider setting aside time to join us for this evening.

Let us pray (together)

God of Love,

Your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us.

He is a sign of your love. Help us walk in that love during the weeks of Advent,

As we wait and prepare for his coming.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

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