

From The Pastor

We are in the already, but the not yet. Jesus has already come, and the redemption of the world has been revealed through his life, death, and Resurrection. In the Advent season, we prepare to commemorate the birth of Jesus and the virtual change he has brought to the human family. There is no other birth like the birth of Jesus. It is appropriate and necessary that we remember with reverence, dignity, and adoration the birth of God in human flesh. Because of his birth, our lives are profoundly different. Where would we be without Jesus as Messiah and Lord? What would our lives be like not knowing the freedom of our sins, the essential love of our Creator, and the promise that after death we will be with that same loving Creator? I cannot help but think of the Exultant that is sung at Easter: 'what good would life have been to us had Christ not come as our Redeemer'. As such, the birth of Jesus is a big deal, way beyond the hubbub of the season that seems to upstage the power of this truth.

This is the already. He has already come, yet we struggle and pine for the completion of all He promises. Advent also bears the task of stirring up our longing in faith for the fulfillment of Christ's second coming. This is part of the promise: Christ will come again. The when is unclear; the need is obvious.

The third and most active task of Advent is to call us to the joyful hope of God with us in the present. We do not live in the past, and we do not live in the future. The only place we can know God is in the present, the right now. This is the promise and the reality of the already and the not yet. We are formed by and grateful for what has been given us in the birth of Jesus, and we long and hope for the fulfillment of all Jesus promises in his future coming.

What do we do in the mean time? This is actually a pretty important question seeing how we spend so much of our lives waiting for things. We wait for actual and real things, like getting the car fixed (mine finally failed to start), standing in line just about anywhere, or the birth of a new family member. We wait for abstract things like maturing in age and wisdom, for God to answer our most ardent prayer, or our wayward child to wake up and fly straight. While we wait for life to happen, what do we do in the mean time? This is the next question of the season.

Last week the question was, 'what are we waiting for'? The love and redemption of God has already been revealed, giving us the power to work with God in bringing it to fulfillment. God has given all we need; we have no need to wait for the next thing.

What do we do in the mean time? We act in the present through what we have learned and believed about our past as we prepare and hope for the future. What have we learned about the past? In the first reading we learn: God is faithful and just, and restores all who are bowed down. We can be hopeful and joyful even in crisis because God will prepare a way. 'Take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever'. This is a stance of faith with great trust in the providence and promise of God. For the refugees of early Israel, and for us, God will act.

We have learned from the past that those with political, social, and economic power will not have the last say in the Kingdom of God. In the gospel, Luke contrasts, in detail, the power of the rulers of the day against the power of the Word of God that is preached by a solitary wild man who lives in the desert.

In the context of world history, Luke sets the stage of the time and place for John and Jesus to come on the scene. The world leaders of the time are named and identified in their role and power. In history, they have passed while Jesus remains. For all the power of these world leaders, their kingdoms have passed, while the Kingdom of Jesus continues to unfold.

From the past we have learned how to live in the present through the power of the Word of God. We have learned to trust that word and to make it the source of our growth and maturing in faith. We have received not only the call to repentance, but also the baptism of Jesus who has consecrated us to himself through the forgiveness of our sins. This we know and believe through the work of the Cross. We are then reminded again by John of the prophecy and vision of God through Isaiah; God will make the way straight and passable for us to find our way to him.

This is what we have learned from the past, and what we long for in the future. So what about the mean time? With all we have learned and believed, we stand with our heads high, in joyful hope, praying for, and working toward the coming of the Kingdom. We claim in a real way what we profess to believe, and we claim the glory of God. We accept the call to repent and conform our lives to the truth of God in love, and we go forward with surety of who we are as God's children with a claim on heaven. We pray with expectant anticipation because God has been, is now, and will always be faithful to what He promises.

Father John Esper

