

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus
Advent I, 2019
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Today we begin the church year anew. It's our New Year's Day. And the Episcopal church and most mainline denominations always begin its new year with the reminder, Christ has died, Christ is risen. And Christ WILL Come again.ⁱ Our culture though, it has a different agenda and it is more concerned with Santa Clause and selling you Christmas presents than it is Jesus Christ. And, as we all know in our heart of hearts, this secularized version of Christmas has very little to do with the things the church proclaims and so the church must stubbornly hold fast to Advent as we actively wait for the second coming of Jesus Christmas and patiently wait on December 25, the real Christmas Season. You see Advent is a time of waiting; Advent is a time of discipline; Advent a time of preparation. In a world where it feels like anything goes. In a world where we can get instant answers on the internet. In a world where we can watch any movie at any time we like. In a world where we can have our groceries delivered to our doorsteps in a matter of hours. It's safe to say that most of us don't wait well. Most of us are not accustomed to having to use that kind of discipline.

And still, even with the world pulling us in one direction and the church trying to just hang on to another, I love this time of year. In fact, Advent has got to be my favorite season of all time. I enjoy the hustle a bustle. I like finding just the right gifts for my loved ones. I even like putting up a Christmas tree even though it's Advent. I can be in this world and yet not of this world. At least I can try. Also, I love the liturgies and the events we as a church can do to help reinforce the themes of the season; the things that the church holds so dear. For example, after church today we are making advent wreaths so that you and your family can have rituals at home that help reinforce Jesus Christ and his coming again, rather than the secular Christmas. On Wednesdays during Advent we will be making Chrismonsⁱⁱ to put on our Chirsmon tree; a monogram of Christ. What are Chrismons and what is a Chrismon tree you might ask. Come on Wednesday and find out. Church members will also be assembling food boxes for St. Gabriel's church in Philadelphia as we are out being Christ's new body in the world as we live in this meantime. On the 22 of December we will be Christmas Caroling at the Wayne Nursing Home as well as a few homes in our surrounding area. At our Early Christmas Eve service, yes, we will be having the traditional angles, shepherds, sheep and the likeⁱⁱⁱ, we will have what we call White Gifts for St. Mary's Chester^{iv} and at 11:00 pm Christmas Eve service we will ring in December 25, Christmas Day, with a traditional midnight mass.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's not rush things. Because it's Advent, not Christmas and this is the church, not Macys. We can't blame the world for doing its thing, but for us, as Christians and followers of Jesus Christ, in Advent, we are going to come to church and hear stories of the adult Jesus teaching his disciples about the End of time. We are going to hear about John the Baptist preaching his baptism of repentance and preparing the way of the Lord. We are going to hear about this same John being imprisoned and wondering if this man Jesus is truly the one, the messiah of God.^v There will be no baby Jesus. There will be no manger nor an Inn. There will be no guiding star in the heavens. And **there-will-be-no**

Christmas carols. Why? Because it's not Christmas. It's Advent and we have got to wait until December 25 for Christmas.

So what's the point? Why does any of this matter? Why can't we sing Christmas Carols yet? It seems that St. Matthew and his community were struggling with just the same issues. No, not about Christmas Carols, but about what's the point? Why does any of this matter? What's taking Jesus so long for Jesus to come again in great glory to judge the living and the dead? You see, they did not like waiting either. By the time Matthew wrote his gospel it was probably 50 years after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. And all the communities of believers were waiting. They had been waiting expectantly for Jesus return. It was imminent. At least that's what they thought. When was the time going to come? And so most of Chapter 24 and 25 of Matthew's gospel deals with the fact that we as a people do not wait well, and yet, we have to. Because we do not know the time or the place of Jesus' second coming, but we are promised, we are assured that time will be when we least expect it. So Matthew warns, be prepared. Story after story is about actively waiting on this second coming and the impending divine judgement.

Think of it this way. We don't get to pick and choose the parts of the bible we want to listen to. Sure, we have our favorite parts, but Holy Scripture is not a buffet and it's not like picking all the amenities on a new computer or a new car. *Let's see, I like the part about Jesus healing ...I'll keep most of that. But this part about judgment, well, that doesn't make me feel very good. Let's leave that part out my personalized bible.* No, Scripture doesn't work that way. We may pretend and act as if Jesus will not actually come again to judge us, but just because we live in denial, that has absolutely no bearing on the fact that we are promised that Jesus will indeed come again and when he does, he will judge the living and the dead. There is no way around it. That's **us** he will be judging. Whether he comes again during our time here on earth or not, we **will** be judged. And Advent: We may like Christmas, Easter, Pentecost or even Lent better, but just because we have a preference, that doesn't magically change the liturgical season. Just because we would feel better if we sang *Joy to the world* rather than *Come, thou long expected Jesus*^{vi}, doesn't change the fact that *Joy to the world* is out of place in Advent. But fear not, *Joy to the world* is coming. Jesus Christ **is** coming again into this world. But it makes me wonder, If Jesus were to come again today, would we be ready? Or would we be at the mall fretting over gifts, or at work trying to pay for a secular version of Christmas, or on our computer living vicariously through the pictures of others who post what appears to be a perfect life while ours isn't so perfect, or on our cell phones sending silly selfies to random friends. Yes, we could be doing any or all that silliness. But Jesus is coming. Ready or not he's coming. So don't get so caught up in the trappings of this world that we totally miss the one thing that we Christians have been waiting for over two millennium. *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus. Born to set They people free; From our fears and sins release us, let us fin our rest in Thee.*

While preparing this sermon and probably all my sermons during this Advent period I am no doubt influenced by Fleming Rutledge's book: *Advent: The once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ*. Other resources include workingpreacher.com and David Lose's blog, *...in the Meantime*.

ⁱ Each or the Eucharist of the book of common prayer have what's called a memorial acclamation. This particular one is from Eucharistic Prayer A.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.chrismon.org/chrismons-ministry.html> has a nice description of Chrismons from the website of the church of the women who dreamed up this idea in 1957.

ⁱⁱⁱ The reference here is to the changes we made in last years Christmas Eve liturgy. We have moved from a full-blown Christmas Pageant, and oh yea, how about a Eucharist in what felt like an afterthought, to a l liturgy with dignity. Instead of the pageant we now have tableau illustrating the gospel being read. The choir is there, and St. Mary's is at its best on what has become our largest service of the year.

^{iv} This is a little inside baseball here. St. Mary's has a long tradition of buying generic gifts, wrapping the min white wrapping paper and bringing them to the Christmas Eve Service. They are later given to St. Mary's Chester for them to distribute. We write on the outside the age and gender of which this gift would be most appropriate.

^v If you look forward in the Revised Common Lectionary, these are the Gospel themes for the first three weeks of Advent.

^{vi} The lyrics of this hymn, which can be found in the 1982 hymnal on page 66 encapsulates the themes of Advent quite well.