Today marks the first Sunday of the Advent season on our liturgical calendar. Each year we welcome this season with great expectation anticipating what is to come. Over the next four weeks, we light the Advent candles to remind ourselves of the true meaning and purpose of this season. Instead of getting consumed by the holiday frenzy, the season of Advent invites us to take a pause within our busy schedule, and reflect of what God has prepared for us – a Savior, not Santa Claus.

The season of Advent not only reminds us of our Savior Christ’s coming, both at the manger 2000 years ago and also what we can expect upon His imminent return. Christ has assured us that He will come once again to fulfill what He has promised, in God’s timing. We just have to be ready and stay awake!

As Ken and Jae read for us earlier the first candle of Advent represents the season of HOPE. In light of the troubling world that we live in today…marred with civil chaos, violence, and hatred, HOPE is becoming more and more difficult to find. Light is difficult to be seen at the end of the tunnel. But our Hope in Christ is more than just a dream or wishful thinking, it gives us a sense of peace and assurance that God will deliver what God has promised to his people at the end. This hope also gives us a goal to pursue…something to look forward to beyond the present world and the life that we live. This is all part of God’s covenant to all of God’s people.

During this season of preparation and waiting, we may find ourselves busy putting up the Christmas decorations with the lightings, ornaments and the trees. We may put on some dazzling displays in and around the house for others to see on the outside, but the question we must ask ourselves is, what about the inside? **How ready are we in preparing ourselves for the arrival of our Savior Christ?** Are we making room for Him in our hearts? Or are our lives simply too busy and our relationships too distanced for Christ to make his re-entry into our lives? Where might Christ make his presence known in the midst of our busy lives and hectic world today?

The theme for our ***Advent Devotion*** this year is *“****Decluttering for Christmas***”. I think it’s an appropriate message for all of us to reflect on. Through the glamorous and shining displays of the season, we may have to look real hard in order for us to find small glimmers of hope of God’s presence among us today. For many of us, we may simply have too much “stuff” that clutter our lives leaving little or no room for the Christ-child to be born.

Our passage today from the Gospel of Mark calls for us to “**stay awake**”, “**remain vigilant**” and to “**stay in hope**”. Throughout the Gospel, as we have been reading the last couple of weeks, Jesus hinted subtle warning messages to His followers about the coming of God’s Kingdom. How we need to be ready when the day of judgment comes. Now we do not know when exactly that may happen, we do know for sure is that there will be series of warning signs of trials and suffering that must take place. There will be darkness of sins and disorders rampant across the land. These are signs of what is to come. So we must stay awake and be ready.

Unfortunately it will get worse before it gets any better. But Christ assured us that despite the seeming trials and suffering, it is well-worth the waiting because Christ will overcome the evils of this world and triumph at the end. *Heaven and earth will pass away, but God’s words and promises will [never] pass away.[[1]](#footnote-1)* We must stay awake and endure until the very end.

Every time we come upon an apocalyptic text during the season of Advent, invariably we find ourselves wrestling with preparing for Christmas the holiday and preparing for Christ’s promised return.

First of all, we know that Christmas will happen on December 25th of every year, although the exact date of Christ’s birth could not be verified. But the point isn’t about the exact date of His birth, but the fact that Christ was born to ALL of humanity.

But waiting for the arrival of Christ requires more than counting down how many more days left until Christmas. It requires greater commitment and faith on our parts to intentionally pursue Christ’s coming and how we may prepare ourselves during this “waiting” period. Just like those wise men from the east who pursued this newborn Savior to be born, they left everything behind, out of their comfort zone, in order to follow the bright shining star that guided them to the newborn king. They had no idea how long or how far they must travel on this journey, but they just went and had faith that they were led on the right path.

Our passages today call for us to keep our eyes opened, stay awake for the kingdom that is **“already here and is yet to come”.** We are living in an “in-between” (liminal) time right now anticipating of what is to come though. We simply do not know when that hour might be. When that day does come, all of us will be held fully accountable for our every action, thoughts, and for the fruits that we bear.

Furthermore, this HOPE anchors our faith into seeing things from God’s perspective rather than ours. We believe in a God of radical faith. Christ came to establish a new order in the midst of a disordered and chaotic world. God’s kingdom was flipped upside down, the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Things may not make sense according to our human perspective, but we trust that our sovereign God is in total control. God will turn our despairs into hope, curses into blessings, chaos into peace, and death into life.

As we read in our Old Testament lesson earlier, the prophet Isaiah uttered a desperate prayer of deliverance to God, *“O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay, and you are our potter. We are all the work of your hands. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember [our iniquity] forever. Now consider, we are all your people.”* [[2]](#footnote-2)

This was a prayer of anger by a frustrated Isaiah, pleading and begging for God’s mercy upon the sins of the people. He prayed that God would come down and grant them a clean start. Isaiah poured out his heart and spoke his mind honestly with God, as we too may find ourselves at times in a peculiar situation of crying out loudly to God in anger, frustration, and in despair pleading for God’s mercy for the iniquities of our troubling world.

We may have plenty of questions that we want answers to but yet God chooses to remain silent to our prayer. But out of this moment of silence, God did speak to us in a subtle way. God spoke to us as we patiently waited for and placed our hope in Him. God still hears us even at times when we stubbornly refuse to hear what God has to say to us.

This week, as many of us witnessed the events unfolded before our eyes on the news coming out of Ferguson, MO, and what consequently trickled onto the streets of many cities around this country, as well as civil disobedience demanding democracy and justice in Hong Kong, in Egypt or other parts of the world, once again we are mindful of the fact that the world needs another “Wake-Up call”!

We don’t need yet another violent demonstration, another burnt down business or more innocent bloodshed, but what we need is to come to God in prayer, pleading for God’s deliverance of mercy, justice and peace….and more importantly HOPE for a reconciled community as God envisioned. **We must stay awake and stay in hope!**

As people of God, we trust that God is still at work among us and continues to reign in our hearts through God’s on-going mission here on earth. Lord, in your mercy…Hear our prayers.

May we “**stay awake and stay in hope**” to be a blessing to those who need healing. May we be the agents of God’s transforming hope, reconciling love and everlasting peace that world so desperately needs right now. ***The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness -- on them a light has shined. Friends, we have HOPE that this light will prevail and shine through the darkness.[[3]](#footnote-3)***

May we invite God to enter into our lives during this season of Advent to start us afresh with a new beginning as we wait for Christ’s coming in hope and expectation. God has commissioned all of us today to bear this light of Christ into the world that is still full of darkness. So let us shine forth to others this beacon light of HOPE. **Stay awake and stay in hope**!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Mark 13:31* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Isaiah 64:8-9* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Isaiah 9:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)