

**JESUS is COMING ... Look Busy!**  
**Sermon, December 2, 2018**  
**First Sunday of Advent; Hanging of the Greens**  
**Jeremiah 33:14-16; I Thessalonians 3:6-13**

We just sang, *“Joy to the World, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King!”* People usually think of that as a Christmas carol, but it is technically an Advent hymn, not a Christmas carol. So for any here who may have come from a liturgical tradition that doesn't deem appropriate the singing of Christmas carols during Advent (*as this is the season of preparation for that celebration*), well, we're safe ... at least today ... for “Joy to the World” is not a Christmas carol. The words for this *hymn of preparation* are adapted from a poem written by Isaac Watts originally entitled *“The Messiah's Coming and Kingdom.”* The lyrics are a paraphrase of Psalm 98, part of which was in our Call to Worship this morning. I've mentioned this in years past, but note that Isaac Watts wrote, “The Lord IS come.” Not “the Lord has come (*past tense*)” or “the Lord will come (*future tense*),” but “the Lord IS come (*present tense*).”

Now, we certainly celebrate in this season that the Lord HAS come. Advent is about remembering how the hopes and fears of all the years were met in Thee that night, o little town of Bethlehem. The Advent season is also about looking ahead. Jesus Himself promised He will come again; He will return to this earth visibly, physically and with finality, as foretold in Psalm 98 *“... to judge the earth, to judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples with equity.”* So during the liturgical season of Advent we remember the Lord HAS come, and we also remember the Lord WILL come as promised ... which, by the way, is not so much a threat as it is a *promise*, a glorious *consolation* ... it is the joyful and certain HOPE (*hence, we light the candle of HOPE on the wreath today*) that God will indeed finish what He started, God will bring to full completion the salvation and redemption of this world He so loved so much that He sent His only begotten Son in the first place. God finishes His work. (*BTW, and this is a sermon in itself, but we should strive to be like Him in these things as well ... keeping our commitments, making good on our intentions, finishing the work God calls us to do!*). God will finish what He started; that is true for you and me and it is true for all creation. What does that mean? It means a world made new without the pain of suffering and death, without disease, without pain, without war, without poverty or refugees or children soldiers or mass shootings. All will be whole, right, good, complete ... and that's a promise. That's good news; that's the Gospel. And that's why Paul writes to the Philippians (*which we will read next week*), *“I am confident of this, that the One who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”*

So, in Advent we remember the Lord *has* come, we remember the Lord *will* come, and Advent is also very much about *right now* ... the Lord IS come, present tense. The Bible tells us, *“Today is the day of salvation.”* Not yesterday, not tomorrow; TODAY. Jesus comes to us today. Advent is very much about the restoring grace and redeeming love of Jesus Who comes to us **in the present tense**, in the day we have, today ... and about us living each and every moment conscious of His living presence with us right now. Advent is past, present and future all rolled into one. Two quick related observations:

1. Back in my Baptist days (*most of you know I was originally ordained to the ministry in the American Baptist Churches, USA*), I remember being asked on more than a few occasions, *“When were you saved?”* I eventually learned to give what I think is the best biblical response to that question: *“I was saved about 2,000 years ago.”* For that's when Jesus **came** and did all the necessary work for salvation. But He also **comes** in the present to meet us in the day we have and to help us “appropriate” that salvation in our lives, *and* He will come again to bring everything to completion. Now, I do clearly remember a starting point for me ... I know not everyone can remember a starting point in their life of Christian discipleship, but I do ... I remember deciding to accept an invitation to come forward at a movie theater after a Billy Graham film (*“For Pete's Sake”*) to commit my life to Jesus as best I knew how; I was with my Methodist Church youth group (*I think there were five of us*) at the time ... that was actually forty-eight years ago this coming Thursday, December 6, 1970. I can honestly say my life began to take on a whole new meaning and purpose from that day forward. But I no longer say I was “saved” December 6, 1970, because (a) the Christian life isn't just “one” decision; each and every day of my life I have to make almost countless conscious decisions to follow Jesus as Lord in every aspect of life, and (b) the full meaning and expression and reality of our salvation in Christ is like Advent ... it is past, present and future all rolled into one. My/our salvation will not be fully complete until that Day I/we see Him face to face ... which, by the way, will happen the day I/we depart this life OR the day He returns; whichever comes first!

2. Imagine what you might do in the next few weeks if you knew for certain that Jesus Christ would actually come back on December 25, 2018. What would change? What would you do differently? How would you prepare for that day? Ideally, nothing would change ... for we are called to live each and every moment as if Jesus comes to us today, in the day we have. The Lord IS come, so we aim to please Him in all we do in the present moment, thankful that He came, all the while eagerly anticipating He will come again as we live a life of Christian discipleship in His glorious presence because He comes to us in the here and now! Now, practically speaking, if I knew with absolute certainty that Jesus was going to return December 25, I might not have paid \$1,000 to remove a large pine tree from my back yard a few weeks ago ... but I digress.

Advent points not only to a past to be remembered and a future to be eagerly anticipated; it also points to the present ... and this is the present Paul points to as he writes to the church at Thessalonica, a church, by the way, who was very much looking forward to the return of Christ. This new congregation had a keen interest in Jesus return, which they apparently fully expected to happen in their lifetimes. To give just a little background to our reading from I Thessalonians: Paul had been away from Thessalonica a few months. When he, Silas and Timothy first came to Thessalonica, they preached in the synagogue for about three weeks, and the new church was born. But the leaders of the synagogue did not take kindly to their work and, in response, instigated a riot ... and Paul, Silas and Timothy had to flee for their lives as they were hastily smuggled out of town. The fledgling church that remained went on to face much persecution from those same synagogue leaders and their devotees in the community. Now, here it is a few months later, and Paul is in Corinth ministering to the Corinth congregation ...



Corinth is about 320 miles south of Thessalonica, which is just about how far the Philadelphia Eagles have to travel whenever they come up here to Foxboro to beat the New England Patriots. (By the way, another Corinth, Corinth, New York is about 220 miles northwest from here at the edge of the Adirondack National Park; our ministry intern Steve was preaching to those Corinthians about a month ago and has been offered a pastorate there ... he hasn't accepted the call yet, as he is weighing additional potential posts: we'll keep you posted). So Paul is over three hundred miles south on the Aegean Sea coastline (a very long boat ride away), and the new Christians in this fledgling church in Thessalonica are weighing heavily upon his heart. Again, he had been with them only three weeks, and he knew they were facing intense resistance and persecution from which he (Paul), Silas and Timothy had to flee for their lives. Timothy has just arrived in Corinth to visit Paul, and Timothy had stopped in Thessalonica along the way. To Paul's delight, Timothy brought a glowing report about the Thessalonica congregation, who, even though they only had barely three weeks of Christian training, seemed to be thriving!

Timothy spoke of the Thessalonians' love, how it was abounding, and how their faith was growing accordingly. Paul writes, in so many words, *"That's great! Yes, Jesus came, and that's why you are a community of faith. And yes, Jesus will return, we don't know when, but He will, and you live in eager anticipation of that! In the meantime, Timothy tells me you have a real handle on what's important! You are living as if Jesus is among you right now! You abound in love! You abound in faith! May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you."* Paul concludes with the note of Advent future expectation: *"May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones!"*

In the little time remaining, I just want to point out that this is THE reliable mark of Christ's living presence in the Today, in the day we have; this is the mark that "the LORD IS COME" in any congregation, including the Thessalonian church (and I can attest is well evidenced here at Greenwood) ... and that is the genuinely Christian love they have for one another, the esteem and respect with which they hold one another, the patience and tolerance with which they lovingly deal with each other, and the joy they find being together with one another ... it is all a very real sign that Christ IS present now, building His church in love, a love that just overflows its bounds and moves beyond the walls of the church ... as Paul writes, *"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else."* Christian love is the love of Jesus poured into our lives that we share with each other and it is shared in such abundance that it overflows our boundaries and moves beyond us into the world out there in need of the Lord Who lives in and among us TODAY ... a Lord Who will lovingly embrace that world through us in the day we have.

There's a bumper sticker I saw awhile back which inspired the sermon title: *"Jesus is coming; look busy!"* Well, yes, Jesus is coming ... but He's also already here. Don't just look busy, **be** busy! Lovingly busy in the things that bring Joy to the World, revealing the Lord IS come. Let earth receive her King. Amen.