

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

November 30, 2025

Isaiah 2: 1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Saint Matthew 24: 36-44

In nomine Jesu!

Advent is my favorite season, and the First Sunday in Advent is my favorite Sunday of the entire Church Year. I've always loved presiding and preaching on this day. But for half of my pastoral ministry, I ceded the pulpit to my mentor, my spiritual "father," who after his retirement lived as a "pastor emeritus" in each of the two parishes I served. He loved this day too. His Advent sermons were excellent; long, but excellent. He always included his sermon in his annual Advent letter – I had to make it fit on one double-sided page – and that letter had to be mailed to over 600 friends and former students so it would arrive on the first Monday of Advent. He took Advent very seriously.

Pastor Damm, or Father John as everyone called him, referred to himself as an unreconstructed evangelical-catholic traditionalist, which means that he ordered his life and ministry by always looking to the past. "Ministry is best compared to rowing a boat," he used to say. "You row with your back to the bow and orient where you are going by looking back to where you had been." He ordered his life that way; he taught us seminary students to think that way (I still do) when it comes to worship. But, given its historic texts, he never preached that way on the First Sunday in Advent.

You see, in Advent, and especially on the First Sunday in Advent, the appointed biblical texts proclaim the exact opposite of his rowboat analogy. Rather than orienting by looking backward to what God has done, these readings – especially on this first Sunday – point us forward, not to what God has done, but to what God will do and to where we and God's whole creation are going. From that perspective and using these readings, Christ's Church invites us to orient our current lives and live and work as if we're already living in the future God is designing. I'll come back to that shortly, but first, a little more about the shape and purpose of Advent.

Long before the Church began celebrating Christ's birth on December 25, it kept Advent. Developed near the end of the western Roman empire in the provinces of Hispania (Spain) and Gaul (France), Advent had the same character and purpose as Lent. It was a time of fasting, penitence and preparation for those who would be baptized on Epiphany (celebrating the coming of the magi with gifts to the infant Christ); or more often on the Sunday after Epiphany (celebrating Jesus' baptism); or the following Sunday (celebrating

Jesus' first miracle at Cana in Galilee). The number of Sundays in Advent varied over the years. Like Lent, it first had six Sundays, beginning on Saint Martin's Day, November 11. Once Christmas was fixed on the Church's calendar, it was reduced to four Sundays, with the last three meant to prepare us to celebrate Jesus' birth. But on the first Sunday in Advent, the ancient penitential nature, emphasizing our expectant preparation for the return of Christ "to judge the living and the dead," remains, inviting us to re-order our lives by reminding us that we are living in end times and calling us to organize the way we live now as if we were already living in the time when God is making all things new. Enough about Advent! Back to the future.

Today's second reading directly addresses us to take note of the time we're in right now. "You know what time it is," Paul writes. It is a chaotic, unruly, dangerous, and frightening time. We don't need Christ, or Christ's Church, to remind us. In fact, many come to worship to escape hearing anything about the chaos of our times. Too political. "I didn't come to church to hear that!" But here's the thing: even in today's Gospel, it's not about the chaos! That's never been the focus. We don't say that our times are "end times" to anger people or worse, scare them to death! No! Advent's focus is on what's on *the other side* of the chaos: on the kind of life, society, and world Emmanuel – God with us, Christ come to bring: a world shaped, not by human whim or political structure; not by "the waste of our wraths and sorrows," but by Christ's "instruction," "the word of the Lord." The Lord who "shall judge between the nations and arbitrate for many peoples." The peoples who, responding to Christ's teachings "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." A new world in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation; [and] neither ... learn war anymore."

If that's where we're going; if that's the world Christ comes to bring, how is Christ calling, gathering, and enlightening us to live right now? Is not Christ calling us to strive now to shape our world, our society, and our lives to at least begin to resemble the world God is already shaping with us, for us, and for all people.

"Know[ing] what time it is;" cognizant of the chaos in which we live, Advent encourages us to orient our lives and shape our times now around the template of the new world to come, not the old world to go. For that way of living, Christ comes to us now; not as a child in a manger; not as a judge, coming in glory; but as food for our journey; nourishment; meant not just to be consumed for ourselves, as we do with everything else in this world; but to be enjoyed and shared together with all who are "glad to go to "the house of the Lord" and who, in the words of the psalmist, know that already "now we are standing within the gates" of God's future together." Happy Advent!

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