

Dear members and friends of St. John,

The season of Advent is again upon us. It's a time of preparation, and that implies that we're **not completely ready**. And of course, we are not. Being ready for Christmas means going shopping for gifts and food. It means thinking about greeting cards – can I use the old cards I have, or should I buy new ones? It seems to be a time of perpetual motion – busyness and motion become our life, and other things, like quiet time with God and prayer, get put on hold.

But the **real Advent preparation** is not about gifts, and greeting cards, and parties, and travel. No, the real preparation that God is looking for is the **preparation of the heart**. You see, Advent not only prepares us for that Virgin birth that took place more than 2000 years ago, we are to prepare ourselves for **Christ's return**.

This preparation for His triumphal return is actually something that is supposed to happen throughout the church year. But Advent is a **special time of focus**, specifically: what does it mean for us as Christians when Christ descends from the heavens?

Jesus tells us about the end of the age, when He will return, with these words from Luke 17: *Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸ Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, ²⁹ but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—³⁰ so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. ³² Remember Lot's wife. ³³ Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. ³⁴ I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left.* [ESV] Jesus purposely tells us that life when He returns will not appear that unusual to those living in that day. In other words, we're not going to get advanced notice so that we can 'hit church real hard' prior to His return. We are told by St. Peter that Jesus will return 'like a thief in the night,' without warning.

What will be the condition of your heart? It's not a trivial matter! Jesus says in the next chapter of Luke, "*Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*" (Luke 18:8).

If you seem to be missing out on the joy of Christmas that you remember from years past, may I suggest that you have exchanged **inner preparation** for **outer activities**. Advent is a time that we prepare **our heart for Christ's return**, and that comes from God's precious Word. God is actually doing the preparing for us! Traditionally, Lutherans have spent **more** time during Advent in God's Word, not less time. Advent devotionals have been in Lutheran hands since shortly after the Reformation. We have a devotional for you this year, "*The True Gifts of Christmas*," by O. P. Kretzmann. Families with young children will also receive children's devotional materials. Use this with your Portals of Prayer. Take an extra 20 minutes a day to focus on God's promises for you. Extend your prayer time as you pray for others that need to know of the love of Christ. Attend **Advent**

midweek worship services, and bring a friend or family member that doesn't have a church home. Finally, be prepared to see how much of a difference God's Word makes in your life!

Advent is a time of preparation. Yes, every Christian can benefit from a refocusing of their life, away from the worldly, and toward their living Lord. We all sin daily and are in need of a heart transplant. But to the question, "will He find faith on earth" – the answer is a resounding "Yes!" He'll find it in you! Let's turn to God's Word and allow the peace of God that surpasses all understanding to keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. This truly is Joy to the World!

Pastor Travis