

**+ Prepare the Way for the Lord! + Lesson Introductions for an Advent Service of Lessons and Carols +  
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Watertown, NY + 8 December 2013 +**

***The Need for a Savior to Come***

**Genesis 3:1-24** – Why Advent? Why a season of preparation? Of course, these weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas are filled with preparations—for Christmas. There's so much going on this time of year—so much hustle and bustle, so many end of the year or end of the semester activities, so many things that distract our attention away from what's really important. Yet the season of Advent is about more than preparing for Christmas. Advent is a season focused on preparing for Christ's coming, but why do we need more preparing?

The season of Advent focuses our hearts on preparing not just for the celebration of Christ's first coming, but especially his second coming, when Christ the King will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. We even take time to focus on how Christ comes to us through his Gospel in Word and Sacraments. We dare not lose sight of the fact that Christ is coming again and we need to prepare for his return, even as he comes to us in Word and Sacraments and as we celebrate his first coming at Christmas.

So why do we need to prepare this Advent season, especially during this time of year? The answer to that question starts in a garden called Eden where our first parents willfully disobeyed their holy God and in so doing brought corruption and ruin and death and sin into our world. They needed a Savior and so would we. He would come and he would crush the Serpent's head, but this same Savior will come again. So we prepare.

***Hear now a lesson from Genesis 3.***

***Prepare with Watchfulness***

**Zechariah 9:9-12** – Perhaps you think it's a little unusual to hear a lesson commonly read on Palm Sunday during the Advent season, but Daughter Zion, see your King is coming. Are you prepared for his arrival? That first Palm Sunday, God's Anointed came riding into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey amidst unusual songs of praise—"Hosanna! Lord, save us!" They didn't praise him as a conquering king, but as their saving Lord. Countless generations had waited for his arrival and had never seen it, but that generation did. He was riding into Jerusalem not to overthrow the Romans as many thought, but to make a covenant with his own blood—a covenant between God and people, a covenant that would free the prisoners of sin and restore the Kingdom of God in the hearts of the people. This is no ordinary king, but One who sacrificed himself for the sinners who praised him on the road to the cross. A time will come when this King will return to our world in great glory and power. Are you watching for his return? Do you wait for his arrival? See, your King is coming! Prepare!

***Hear now a lesson from Zechariah 9.***

***Prepare with Repentance***

**Isaiah 11:1-0** – There's nothing beautiful or significant or living about a stump? A stump is dead. Yes, you count its rings to determine how old the tree was during its glory days, but if you're looking at a stump, it's a tree that was rather than a tree that is. Perhaps it was rot. Perhaps it was death. Perhaps it was being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Whatever the case, that tree is dead—unless new life surges forth from it again. That's what happened to the line of King David, when the Babylonians reduced the mighty oak of Jesse, his father, to a mere stump, but 700 years before Christ's coming, the prophet Isaiah looked closer at that stump and saw a shoot coming up, a Branch that would bear fruit. A new King was coming who would be like no other king in the history of the world, whose kingdom would be like no other in the history of the world. This King of kings would bring peace through forgiveness and his own righteousness, but also holy judgment and eternal condemnation for those who oppose him. In that sense, Isaiah gives us a glimpse of Christ's first coming and his return and in so doing he calls us to repent, to turn from our sins and live, but that's only possible if Christ the King himself turns our hearts away from sin and back to our God. What glorious grace, then, that he shows to us in turning our hearts through his saving Gospel, while bringing peace for our souls! The King is coming. Let us prepare with the repentance he has wrought in our hearts through his Word!

***Hear now a lesson from Isaiah 11.***

### ***Prepare with Joy***

**Isaiah 35:1-10** – We're nearing the darkest time of winter, aren't we? The temperatures have plunged. The snow is starting to fly. The days have gotten shorter and the nights longer. The plants have a fresh coat of frost and the trees look lifeless without leaves. As we all know, there's plenty of winter still to come, but what a glorious day is that first day of spring, when the snows are melting and buds are on the trees, when the temperatures warm up and the flowers and plants return to life. The prophet uses a similar picture as he describes the impact of the coming Messiah, the coming Savior. He describes a barren desert suddenly filled with new life and beauty with the spring rains. By nature, our hearts are dead and barren. We see that even more this time of year when we realize that our best efforts to be nice and cheerful are feeble at best or least they're short-lived, but then the Savior comes through his Gospel. The Savior comes and changes our hearts forever. Suddenly what once was dead and ugly and hostile becomes alive and beautiful and filled with joy. The King is coming. Prepare with joy!

***Hear now a lesson from Isaiah 35.***

### ***Prepare with Hope***

**Isaiah 7:10-14** – The weeks leading up to Christmas are often described as a “season of hope”, but what kind of “hope” are people hoping for? Peace and reconciliation in their home between fighting relatives? Peace in a world constantly beset with war and conflict? Getting that gift that you really wanted, whether it's the new PS4 or the romantic love pictured in a Hallmark movie? To be honest, many hope for what they're not sure will ever happen. So dreams are peddled as hopes and then get stored away with the lights and tinsel by the time January 2 rolls around. In Isaiah's time, there wasn't much hope for God's people either. King Ahaz was a godless man who played the role of pious hypocrite very well, but even in that hopeless time, the Lord of grace gave hope—real hope—to his people. In the womb of a virgin a Child like no other would be conceived and he would be called “Immanuel”, which means “God with us”. God himself would take on human flesh and put himself in our hopeless world, not so we could hope for a better tomorrow or a peaceful world, but so we could put our hope in him—hope for forgiveness of all our sins, hope for real peace in a peaceless world, hope for eternal life with him in heaven. In the midst of all the superficial “hope” of these weeks before Christmas, see your King comes to you as an infant just as you once were. Prepare with hope!

***Hear now a lesson from Isaiah 7.***

### ***Prepare for the Savior Is Coming***

**Luke 1:26-38** – 700 years. It would take 700 years for Isaiah's prophecy to be fulfilled when the angel Gabriel informed a virgin named Mary that she would be the mother of our Lord. Imagine her joy knowing that all the watching and waiting of her people would finally be fulfilled. Imagine her excitement at knowing that her King, her Savior was finally coming. Takes your breath away, doesn't it? The time for his second coming is drawing near. Now do you see why we have Advent during this time of year? The King is coming. Let us prepare!

***Hear now a lesson from Luke 1.***