

As St. Alban's enters into this extended Advent season beginning today, our readings lead us to start with the second prong of the dual meaning of Advent as the preparation season – not JUST for the **long-awaited birth of our Messiah.** Any description or retelling of the story of the betrothed couple seeking shelter as Mary nears the time of her delivery is a captivating one – perhaps one of the most widely known stories from the Gospel of Luke – known far beyond the Christian faith, even! That part of the understanding of the season of Advent will come soon enough.....but today our readings offer us a reminder of the lesser known understanding of the meaning of preparing for the coming of the Messiah during Advent – the preparation of Christ's coming again in great glory.

The season of Advent is often usurped by the commercialistic nature of the world around us – stores are stocked with poinsettias and there is some sort of viral Christmas tree at Home Depot that folks are chasing that is apparently the only way you can have the merriest of Christmases. Our

time spent in Advent is quite countercultural – a movement of resistance against commercialism and the overbearing rush to skip to the so-called “good part.” You know the one.....where we remember a cute baby cooing in a manger while we open a pile of presents.....as if that is the end game to Advent.

“But as for me, I am poor and needy; come to me speedily, O God. You are my helper and my deliverer; O Lord, do not tarry.” This closing phrase from our appointed psalm for today has the psalmist begging for God to come.....and please..... hurry it up! The prophet Amos seems to say that it’s almost too late for us poor and needy folk.....but a more optimistic Paul writes to the people of Thessalonica around 800 years after Amos’ prophecy of doom and gloom, that all of us will have the chance to be with Jesus – both the dead and the living. What a difference 800 years make! So what are we to think and do as followers of Jesus in this season of Advent preparation?

First, I commend you and your priest for creating this extra time and space for preparation. You have just left behind an extended time we call “ordinary” in the church.....*ordinary* in its focus on our *ordinary* lives of faith and our commitment to grow and nurture that faith with intention. From the feast of Pentecost until All Saints Day, we have been hearing scripture that describes the kingdom of God and heaven and what they are like through the parables; we have been immersed in stories of healing and prayer and how we are called to be as people who seek to center God in our lives. And now, we enter the Advent season to put those practices we have hopefully been nurturing to help us prepare our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls for the coming of Christ.

Secondly, we are invited in Advent the opportunity to enter this season with deeper understandings, wider horizons, and higher expectations within our preparations for the coming of Christ The Advent Project is a liturgical movement in the wider church that impresses upon us the need for us to more deeply understand God across the spectrum of new life to eternal life. The Very Rev. William H. Peterson is the driving force behind

the Advent Project, and he writes that we should use our Advent time to consider the fulfillment of our resurrection promise of salvation through Jesus Christ – that preparing for a baby to be born who will change everything for God's people is only have the story. Jesus will come again and we are a people who have chosen to embrace the promise of life everlasting and love that never ends in Christ.

Jesus is the beginning and the end of our belovedness – the love of Christ from which God will not be separated. Advent offers us a season that focuses on both the beginning and the end. As you faithfully embrace an expanded Advent preparation season, may Jesus be revealed to you in fulfillment of the baptismal prayers to be brought into the fullness of God's peace and glory. And I will continue to pray that your faithfulness in this season will bring Christ anew to you again and again.