

ADVENT BEGINS WITH HOPE

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They therefore believe they will be destroyed soon by a powerful force.

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In most millenarian scenarios, the disaster or battle to come will be followed by a new, purified world in which the true believers will be rewarded. – Wikipedia

Scripture:

**Matthew 12
Isaiah's Prophecy**

"In his name nations will put their hope."

17. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:
18. "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.
19. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will any one hear his voice in the streets;
20. he will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick, till he brings justice to victory;
21. and in his name will the Gentiles' hope."

Luke 21

The coming of the new age

25. "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves,
26. men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.
27. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
28. Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."
29. And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees;
30. as soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near.
31. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.
32. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all has taken place.
33. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
34. "But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare;
35. for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth.
36. But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man."
37. And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet.
38. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.



HOPE FOR THE JOURNEY

- **Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all.**
- **"Our greatest glory consists not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall."**

Confucius (adapted)

HOPE FOR ADVENT

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, 2006. Our scriptures focus on the hope that a Messiah would come who would rescue the Jews from suffering at the hands of the Romans. He would be a Messiah who would be a light to ALL nations. He would bring hope and peace to ALL the world, and justice to every victim. Luke says a new heaven and new earth are waiting to emerge. A Messiah will come to us and bring us hope.

That's our story. It's a good story. Our task in the next four weeks is to reconnect with our story and with the very beginning moments of the Christian faith. Retelling our story brings it to the front of our minds once again. We connect ourselves with where we came from, and invariably we discover something new about who we are. Every year it seems there are people who have never really heard our story told with clarity.

The Christmas story is our memory of peace, love, and joy; and the story of Advent begins with hope.

**HOPE IS ESSENTIAL FOR HAPPINESS AT ANY AGE.
 TO BE SPIRITUALLY HAPPY, WE NEED
 SOMETHING MEANINGFUL TO DO,
 SOMETHING TO LOVE,
 AND SOMETHING TO HOPE FOR.
 (ALLAN CHALMERS)**

Hope has nothing to do with geography, chronology, or social-economic status. The story of hope is one of the truths that we must discover again and again. Something meaningful to do, something to love, and something to hope for in the time and place where we live.

The basics of life are quite simple, yet some times they seem endlessly complex. Our story of

Advent is universal, and it transcends time and culture. Advent begins with hope.

Never deprive someone of hope. Sometimes hope may be all they have.

Hope separates us from most of the animal and plant world. Most of life can only see its present condition. Memories, guilt, success and failure, these are ours alone. And hope is the ability to lift ourselves out of the present and toward the future. I can think of no other animal with this ability to project the future beyond the immediate needs of the day.

THE WORRIER

I recently met a worrier. Worry is the adversary of hope. Maybe you know a worrier. My worrier was nearly paralyzed by all the preparations that were necessary for a memorial service for a family member. She had prepared long lists of worries that included food, facilities, ushers, what to wear, a time for an appointment to get her hair done, transportation, and more food. Each was a worthy worry. Every part of that was important. None of us can be critical of a person who wants the best memorial they can create.

But I ask, what is wrong with this picture? If you were the pastor, what would you need to say to her?

I hope you would say, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength." (*Corrie Ten Boom*)

We need to keep the number one thing, as the number one thing.

We merely need to do the best we can, and no one who gives their best ever needs to regret it. Our best will be good enough because we are praising God for a person we loved, and the rest of the world will just have to deal with it if their favorite food is not on the table. The number one thing at a memorial service is to thank God that we were lucky enough to have one of God's saints in our midst even if we could not keep hold forever.

We did the best we could, and it was just right.

WE BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST

Memories of our background and our circumstances influence where we begin life, but the message of advent is that we are responsible for

who we can become. We can become the children of God through Christ. That lesson does not bind us to winning, but to being true and faithful. We live by the light we have, and that is the light revealed in Jesus Christ.

Abraham Lincoln put it better when he said: "I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live by the light that I have. I must stand with anybody that stands right, stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong."

Hope frees us from the past. Advent begins with hope.

MILLENARIANISM

The Pastor's Class that I teach on Wednesdays is nearly finished with an eye-opening account of the settling of the American west. Everyone in the class has wondered what we might have done in the same circumstances. We have asked where the church was when one civilization overcame another—sometimes brutally. The settling of California by Europeans was only 150 years ago. Battles on the plains like the Bozeman Massacre, Custer's Last Stand, and the final massacre at Wounded Knee took place just a century and a half ago. Slavery and relationships with the Indians were prominent issues right here in churches along the Santa Rosa Creek not long ago by people who could be our parents or grandparents, and you can see their gravestones at the Rural Cemetery.

THE GHOST DANCE

One part of the story that I didn't know much about until we saw the PBS series is called "The Ghost Dance." I want to say a few words about it to you this morning since you will see connections with the world into which our own Messiah was born. You will need to look up the details in an encyclopedia when you get home if you don't remember The Ghost Dance from your own studies of American History.



Many historical accounts discuss the **Ghost Dance of 1890**. The Ghost Dance was a religious movement incorporated into numerous Native American belief systems. The traditional ritual used in The Ghost Dance, the circle dance, has been used by many Native Americans since pre-historic times, but was first performed in accordance with Jack Wilson's teachings among the Nevada Paiute in 1889. The practice swept throughout much of the American West, quickly reaching areas of California. At the core of the movement was the prophet of peace Jack Wilson, known as Wovoka among the Paiute, who prophesized a nonviolent end to American expansion while preaching messages of clean living, an honest life, and cross-cultural cooperation.

Perhaps the best known facet of The Ghost Dance movement is the role it reportedly played in instigating the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890, which resulted in the deaths of nearly 400 Lakota Sioux.

(The Sioux variation on The Ghost Dance tended towards millenarianism, an innovation which distinguished the Sioux interpretation from Jack Wilson's original teachings.)

It is the connection with millenarianism that links it to the world into which Christ was born. The Birth of Jesus that transformed the world of the Roman Empire was part of a millenarian expectation, just like The Ghost Dance represented the hopes of the American Indians to restore their native cultures.

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things will be changed in a positive (or sometimes negative or ambiguous) direction.

Millenarian groups typically claim that the current society and its rulers are corrupt, unjust, or otherwise wrong. They therefore believe they will be destroyed soon by a powerful force. The harmful nature of the status quo is always considered intractable without the anticipated dramatic change. ... Only dramatic change will change the world and change will be brought about, or survived, by a group of the devout and dedicated. In most millenarian scenarios, the disaster or battle to come will be followed by a new, purified world in which the true believers will be rewarded.

Millenarian beliefs can make people ignore conventional rules of behavior, which can result in violence directed inwards (such as mass suicides) and/or outwards (such as terrorist acts). It sometimes includes a belief in supernatural powers or predetermined victory. In some cases, millenarians withdraw from society to await the intervention of God or another metaphysical force.

Why is this important? I believe our world is in the midst of the same movement. Everything we have said about the expectation of a Christ and the expectations of the Indians to restore their culture, can be found in the pages of the newspapers that are delivered to our homes.

Christianity was a way of focusing hope on the world to come. Millenarianism is a theological term that describes the origins of our faith, and I would like you to take home the definition supplied in the bulletin, and compare that with stories of third world violence in many corners of the world right now.

**ADVENT BEGINS WITH HOPE,
AND OUR HOPE AT ADVENT IS THAT
PEACE, JUSTICE, LOVE AND JOY
CAN COME OUT OF THE STRIFE
THAT WE SEE ALL AROUND US.**

REINHOLD NIEBUHR SAID,

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime;

Therefore, we are saved by hope.

Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history;

Therefore, we are saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone;

Therefore, we are saved by love.

No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own;

Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

HOPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Our past is not our potential. Hope says we can choose peace. We can choose love; we can choose reconciliation and justice.

Never surrender that choice, where ever you go.

So what can we say of hope in winter? I found no shortage of advice. If you can remember just one of these, I think you will understand one of the most important lessons that the Advent season has in store for you:

- **Hope starts to sing while it is still dark."**
Author unknown
- **"When you reach the end of all the lightness that you know and are about to step over into darkness...Faith is knowing that one of two things will happen. Either there will be something solid there to step onto or you will be taught to fly."**
Author Unknown
- **"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us. "**
Ralph Waldo Emerson
- **"The hardest battle you're ever going to fight is the battle to be just you."**
Leo Buscaglia
- **"Changing directions in life is not tragic; losing passion in life is."**
Max Lucado
- **"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength."**
Corrie Ten Boom
- **"To the world you might be one person, but to one person you might be the world."** *Casey*



**Dr. John H. Cushman
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
December 3, 2006**