

Time moves on....as it always does. We have survived another Halloween, Reformation 500 has been celebrated, and another Thanksgiving weekend is in the past. Those non-sentimental, but nonetheless annoying, 21st century notable dates like Black Friday and Cyber Monday are also recent history. So now we await Christmas. We plan for travel and the gathering of families. We prepare our budgets for the onslaught of gift purchases and the costs of Christmas. We pray for peace and order in a world filled with wars and disorder. The season we now enter is not pre-Christmas, but it is the Advent season. So continuing with our 500th year thought, what does Advent mean?

The word Advent originated with the Latin word *adventus* meaning 'coming'. The early Christians were eagerly awaiting the coming of a Savior, a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. Indeed, Christ did arrive in humble fashion in a manger. Centuries later we no longer await His first arrival, but prepare for His second coming. The second coming will be the one to end all suffering on earth and reunite us with the heavenly realm in eternal glory. The new church year begins on Sunday, December 3rd in preparation for Christ's coming. We prepare for the celebration of His birth, as well as prepare for His eventual return. The familiar Advent hymn states is so succinctly:

Oh Come, Oh come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lowly exile here,
Until the Son of God appears,
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee oh Israel.

Indeed the **ransom** has been paid. Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection has rescued us from a **captive** damnation. Our hope is alive and real. We now await His second coming. The **mourning** still exists as we contemplate this world and its violence, its evils, and its temptations. Our **exile** in this world makes us look forward to the next world. Within our own sinfulness and need for grace is the necessity leading us to pray for the Holy Spirit to renew His work in conforming us into the image of Christ. What a perfect segue to this year's school theme "**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**" 2nd Corinthians 5:17.

Rejoice! Rejoice! The Savior has come and we await and prepare diligently for His next appearance. Advent is preparation of the celebration of Christmas, but, oh, it should be so much more. The preparation for the feast that is to come....the eternal feast. Originally, Advent was a time of fasting in anticipation of the great event. Certainly fasting would not hurt too many of us this time of year, but what other preparations are you making to contemplate our Lord's next arrival? Consider attending Advent services each Wednesday, as well as Sunday services. Personal devotions and prayer often ease the mind in a season of stressful activities. We know we have much to be thankful for, but in reality, we have even more blessings to realize. So "cheer us, disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and make safe the way that leads on high". Remember God is so good. **Rejoice! Rejoice!**