

From Darkness to Light

Have you seen the memes or cartoons online that talk about how dark it is? “What time is it? Is it 11:30 PM?” “No, it is 4:30 PM!”

We are being plunged into darkness. And, I hate to tell you this, but it is only going to get worse before it gets better. The sunset time will get earlier and earlier as we progress through the month. But then, we have some hope. Right around Christmas Day, the sun sets a little later each day and we experience less darkness and more light. Do you realize what we have at the end of November we will have at the end of January?

In the meantime, we have all kinds of things that we have to do, even here at the churches. We had photos with Santa, Manger Blessings, Holly Bazaar, Thrift Shoppe, and a big Concert. And this was all before December 2! Personally, I have been trying to help coordinate things in the churches while also being in a show with the Westfield Theatre Group. We also have the New England Brass and a Cookie Sale as well as our Christmas Eve Pageant at 9:30 AM (joint service in Westfield) and services at 4:30 PM (Westfield) and 6:30 PM

(Southwick.) We will join again on December 31 at 11:00 AM in Southwick.

But what are we doing for Advent? Oh, I know, there are presents to buy and wrap, homes to decorate, dinners to plan, parties to coordinate; trust me, I am right there with you. This year I even started my Christmas shopping in October. Let's hear it for online shopping!

Again, what are we doing for Advent? Just as joy and excitement start to bubble up inside us, we run into today's text which serves as a reminder that not everything is illuminated with sparkles and bows. But what about our devotion and our prayer? This devotion will come to us as we are deep in the midst of planning ahead...

“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven and the powers in heaven will be shaken”

What is Advent, anyway? When you are not a liturgical church, it is hard to define seasons. Oh sure, we may sing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” or “On Jordan's Banks” and we may even have an Advent wreath with some prayers. What I'd like you to consider is that Advent

is a time of reflection and preparation. In this season we make preparations for the feast, the gifts, the pageant, and the candle lighting. We anticipate a season of love and light.

For many of us, this planning must also include a space for the darkness of the season. For some, reminders of Christmases past and loved ones who once sat alongside us may fill our hearts with sadness or even anger. We can be shaken by the darkness of the season. We can be shaken by not wanting to share in the absolute joy others feel. Walking through the season of darkness can feel like drowning in quicksand. The louder the joyous celebrations, the tighter the sand seems to become, and it drags you downward.

The trick, or some people will say, the hard part, is to not get swallowed up in the darkness. I am very well aware of the desire to put on your “loungewear” (aka pajamas) at 4:45 and stay in for long stretch of darkness. The older I get, I see the beauty in it. The darkness that accompanies Advent allows us to simply stop, look, pray, and listen. It is more of a time to look inward to prepare ourselves for Christmas.

It is my hope that we can use this time of Advent, this time in the darkness, to allow us to let the Christ Child be born in our hearts once again. Christ is our Light at Christmas. It also signifies that the days will start to be longer. We may not notice it until February, but even through a pending snowstorm, we can see the light at the end of the dark tunnel of winter. My prayer for all of us is that we can let Christ be that light at Christmas and all throughout the year. Come, Lord Jesus! Come, and be born in hearts. Amen!