**Advent 1 Hope 2024**

The 4 Sundays leading up to Christmas are called Advent.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent.

The Advent season comprises the four weeks before Christmas. It is an old tradition dating at least as far back as 400AD when the early church observed a period of preparation leading up to Christmas.

It is a time when we prepare our hearts and our minds for the coming of God’s Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The word “Advent” means “to come,” and the Advent season focuses on remembering Christ’s first coming at Christmas and then also anticipating Christ’s second coming and soon return.

We focus with chameleon eyes at this time – one pointing in each direction.

We look to celebrate the birth of the Christ child 2000 years ago in Bethlehem

Isaiah 9:6 *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

But we also have an eye to the second coming of Christ sometime soon.

Revelation 1:4-8 *John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*  *Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

Today we focus on that twin concept of hope.

Hope in the Advent season leading up to Christmas is important because it bring into stark relief Jesus Christ as the hope of the world.

The theme of hope is important not just to us but for the whole world

Our world is in desperate need of hope. Many people today live without hope or have given up hope.

In statistics compiled in the USA, 42% of high school students reported feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year. This percentage is higher for females (57%), Hispanic students (46%), multiracial students (49%), and lesbian, gay or bisexual students (69%) (CDC, 2023)[[1]](#footnote-1)

They walk in darkness of hopelessness.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, the Russian author wrote: Totally without hope one cannot live. To live without hope is to cease to live. Hell is hopelessness. It is no accident that above the entrance to Dante's hell is the inscription: "Leave behind all hope, you who enter here."

But Christ came at Christmas to bring us hope, and that is what we see in the Scriptures this morning.

Isaiah 9:2 *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

We know that our hope rests in that great light, Jesus.

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* ***4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.***

Hopelessness is rife among school pupils, yet we cannot get our message into the schools to provide a solution – an introduction to the God who is hope.

We have removed the appeal to the Divine from Parliament and our local ICC, and wonder why we are failing to provide hope.

Jesus came into this world of hopelessness. Free of sin himself, he endured the consequences of sin on the cross, and in his resurrection, he was victorious over death and hopelessness[[2]](#footnote-2)

God can’t help himself in pouring out hope because hope is part of his essence. He is hope. God is an immense ocean, bottomless and overflowing with hope. God’s hope is excessive and beyond measure and given to us in abundance. Hope, his positive creative energy, drives us forward, seeking him, longing for him.

Paul prayed in Romans 15:13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

We Christians are people of hope because of our belief in God, and in particular, in the God who created the world and created human life within it for a purpose, which he will fulfil.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In these times of uncertainty in our world, we need to turn our eyes to the God who is our hope. And we need to introduce people to that God of hope

God is the source of all hope and the reason to rejoice. He won’t leave us in despair – God shares this gift of hope with us.

As the late NZ pastor and writer Mike Riddell wrote: Our hope in Jesus is not an empty escapist hope; it is a hope full of substance. It works with the raw materials of the here and now, but it is not content to let it be. There is always the vision of what yet might be. Hope is the barb on the hook of God, and it holds us fast.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Our hope is not the same as optimism or wishful thinking, which imply a denial of reality.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Biblical hope not only desires something good for the future — it expects it to happen. And it not only expects it to happen — it is confident that it will happen. There is a moral certainty that the good we expect and desire will be done.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Lewis B. Smedes, Christian author, wrote: Hope is to our spirits what oxygen is to our lungs. Lose hope and you die. They may not bury you for a while, but without hope you are dead inside. The only way to face the future is to fly straight into it on the wings of hope....hope is the energy of the soul. Hope is the power of tomorrow.

We have hope because our God is a God of hope.

The Advent season is also a time of preparation, a time of waiting, a time of expectancy.

The Advent season is all about waiting. It’s a time when we remember the long period of waiting that preceded the first coming of Christ – the whole of the Old Testament, in fact - and also a time when we reflect on our own season of waiting for the second coming of Christ.

Romans 8:22 *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we were saved.*

Joan Chittister (American theologian, nun) wrote that Advent calls us to hope in the promise that God is calling us to greater things and will be with us as we live them.

She wrote that hope is the recall of good in the past, on which we base our expectation of good in the future, however bad the present. [And that] it digs in the rubble of the heart for memory of God’s promise to bring good out of evil and joy out of sadness and on the basis of those memories of the past, takes new hope for the future. Even in the face of death. Even in the fear of loss. Even when our own private little worlds go to dust, as sooner or later, they always do.

We need hope for the future and we need hope in the present.

In the Northern Hemisphere, Christmas is celebrated in the dead of winter, where the hope is a physical hope that spring is coming.

We do not have that physical reminder of hope here in the Southern Hemisphere because it is summer, but regardless we do need to hope.

Hope comes after a season of lack of hope.

After 400 years of silence and no prophetic words, God spoke, and the world changed through the unlikely birth of our Saviour to a young woman in lowly circumstances

Matthew 1:23 “*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel*”

Immanuel means “God with us”.

During Advent we can agree with all the ones who were before his first coming, singing, O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

Together we can wait with anticipation for the life that will arise. The growing hope for the birth of Christ; the arrival of God among us!

The Advent season’s most important reason is the hope that Christ brings to a lost world. *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”* (1 Timothy 3:15)

That means he came to save you and to save me and those who do not yet know him. We remember the birth of Jesus at Christmas, remembering also that he would grow to be a man and die on the cross for your sins and mine.

The goodness of God for us is never exhausted. The best is still to be.

According to Marva Dawn, writing on the book of Revelation, “God’s message to us is that in the present we are not always going to win; our lives will not always be categorised by triumph. That is a lesson hard to accept – in fact, impossible – except that it is balanced on the opposite side with this hope: eventually we will win because Christ reigns.[[7]](#footnote-7)

And she continues: The book of Revelation is not trying to teach us how the world will end. Rather, it seeks to comfort us in our struggles with the hope that, in the end, evil will ultimately be vanquished forever.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The double hope is there before us: Christ who came to give us hope of our sins forgiven but also the hope of the coming of Christ in power in the last days

This whole thought of Advent and hope takes our minds off the Christmas shopping frenzy and Christmas food panic buying and the CocaCola promoted chubby bearded man in the red suit.

It lifts our heads to the cosmic significance of Christmas; it positions Christmas as the focal point of eternity. It is not an accident that the BC/AD fulcrum of history rests on the birth and death of Jesus.

Christmas is not about us and what we get or what we give. Christmas is about God breaking into our 3-dimensional world and giving us hope.

So, if you are discouraged this morning – if you are tired of waiting, if you feel like giving up, if you’ve faced too many disappointments in life – then let me point you to Christ and the hope that is found in him alone.

I am going to conclude with a song by Matt Maher. As we listen to it, I want us to reflect on these questions:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEvl1-5zUWQ Matt Maher “Hope for everyone”

Our hope consists of 2 planes: hope in our eternal salvation and hope in this world.

*“You are my refuge and my shield; your word is my source of hope.”* Psalm 119:114 (NLT)

What are you hoping for this Advent season?

1 Peter 1:3 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*,

Can you put your hope in God?

*“Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him.”* Psalm 62:5 (NIV)

Can you share this message of hope to others who still remain in darkness and separated from Christ?

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*. —Romans 15:13

1. https://jedfoundation.org/mental-health-and-suicide-statistics/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. C Stephen Evans “New Possibilities” *Decision* March 1994 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bruce Milne *Know the Truth* 344 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mike Riddell *Godzone: a travellers guide* 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Philip Yancey *Where is God when it hurts?* 210 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-is-hope [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Marva Dawn *Joy in our Weakness*: 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Marva Dawn *Joy in our Weakness*: 174 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)