

Advent Devotions Week 1 “Hope”

Monday – Jim Pierce

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see the lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

Hope does not exist without a context. Even at its shallowest, hope always carries with it a looming other. “I hope I sleep well tonight,” carries with it the fear that I won’t because I haven’t been. “I hope my team wins,” carries with it the knowledge that they might well not. “I hope it doesn’t snow,” carries with it plans for the day that might be messed up if it does, or a forecast that says, “snow is coming.”

At its deepest, hope travels together with real fear, real doubt. “I hope all those tests the doctor ordered come back okay.” “I hope we can patch up, repair this thing that is tearing our family apart.” “I hope we survive all those things that are tearing our country, our world apart.” “I hope those who warn us of intensifying effects of climate change are wrong.” “I hope that my salvation doesn’t depend on me, because if it does, I’m screwed.” So much to worry about, so much to fear! It’s no wonder sometimes we don’t sleep well at night.

Among the hymns of Advent and Christmas, these hymns most sing of hope to me: O Little Town of Bethlehem, which starts with the verse quoted above, and It Came Upon the Midnight Clear, which speaks of a weary world and people bending low beneath life’s crushing load as they toil across sad and lowly plains. Why? Because they dare to intrude on our seasonal excitement and anticipation with a message that tells us just how much we need hope, how lost we are without it.

These hymns tell it like it is. We are lost, we are hopeless if all we have to count on is ourselves, our families, our friends and maybe on our enemies repenting of their ways. We are lost, hopeless, except that God shines an everlasting light on our fears. We are lost, hopeless, except that on that midnight clear the angels will once again sing that glorious song of old, proclaiming that our hope is not in ourselves, but only in God who comes into our world, lives and dies in our world, and beyond death is raised again for us and for our world.

Our hope, our true hope, is not in ourselves or others or in anything else in the whole of creation. Our hope, our true and only hope is in the one whose birth we strain toward in this Advent season.

Turn our eyes, our hearts our whole beings toward you, O God, in this Advent season and always, for in you only can we truly hope. Amen.

Tuesday – Phil Hornbostel

My favorite Advent hymns are typically liturgical dances, most often written in $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{6}{8}$ -time signature. It is perhaps unique in Advent, of all our church seasons, that the music that predominates is “dance music”. How very odd for church music, and yet, in its own unique way, it is fully appropriate that we, God’s people, look with almost overwhelming hope and excitement for the gift of Christmas, which we know from both prophecy and history, is most assuredly “coming” (which is what the word *advent* means!). And so we are invited, in our hearts if not in our actions, to the dance of Advent. Listen, this season and in the Advent seasons throughout your life, for the skipping, hopping, exciting rhythms that make Advent so special and so inspiring for Christians everywhere.

My selection for this first devotional is, perhaps ironically, the only carol I have selected for this series, *not* written in $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{6}{8}$ meter, but the composer’s clever use of syncopated quarter and eighth notes makes it dance nonetheless. With both music and libretto provided by the great Catalan priest and musician Alberto Taule, this carol appeared in Barcelona, Spain in 1972. Here it is in English translation (you can find it in the red hymnal #266):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BSXyFD1YIY&t=50s>

Its libretto captures the sense of HOPE in the first verse, calling us to gather in anticipation of the coming of the Christ Child. The second verse draws straight from Isaiah 7:14, in the promise of Emmanuel. The third verse is well known from both Isaiah and the New Testament proclamations of John the Baptist. But then notice how cleverly Fr. Taule changes the mood in verse four, to that of a coming *second* appearance of Jesus in our world. Ultimately it is *this* hope that fuels our Advent excitement in this and every Advent season. Listen for this theme to recur in further hymns in this Advent season, especially in my fourth selection.

O come, Hope of our lives and the lives of everyone on earth. Bring us the assurance of Your mercy and grace, and fill our hearts with love, joy and peace. We give You thanks for all the wonder and anticipation that this season brings, and await the exhilaration of Christmas morning through the eyes of our childhood. Amen

Wednesday – Jeff Langdon

Over the past decade or so, every few years the choir here at First Lutheran has performed a cantata during Advent called THE WINTER ROSE, by Joseph Martin. In the cantata there is a song call ADVENT CALL. The melody has a plaintive quality that haunts me and it has become one of my favorite advent songs to reflect on during advent. I have it downloaded onto my computer and in my iPhone.

The song is a filled with longing for the Messiah and the promise of redemption. Embedded in the lyrics are the Advent themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. These themes are used by countless churches worldwide during the four Sundays of Advent.... leading up to Christmas. While many see the season of Advent as a lead-up to Christmas, the season is more appropriately celebrated as a time in the Church Year when we remember and reflect on the promise of Christ's return, A season of waiting.

Peace will come on the wings of a promise"
Hope will come like the morning's first call
Joy will come in the winds of the spirit
Love will come, Love will come
Come Lord Jesus

Everyone needs hope. Everyone should give hope. Everyone thrives when they have hope. Hope is like waking up to a new day. Whatever happened yesterday is yesterday's news. What will be today and tomorrow awaits you.

For the follower of Christ, our hope comes from the Good News of the Gospel. Our hope is not something we wish for... it is not a dream. It is what the writer of Hebrews 11:1 tells us. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen." ... being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

As God's people hoped in the coming of the Messiah, theirs was not supposed to be some sort of flimsy or wishful hope. That hope is like wishing it won't rain on our vacation. That hope is like hoping the Chiefs will be in the Super Bowl. But, the hope of God's people waiting for the coming Messiah was deeply rooted in the certainty of their relationship with God, their experience of God's faithfulness, and their remembering thru generation after generation.

In today's world of immediate gratification, we can hardly wait weeks or even days for something, let alone generations. But the story of God's people shows us that waiting in hope isn't a "let's sit back and do nothing" kind of waiting. The hope we remember in Advent is active...always listening to God... always learning...living a life of certainty of what we do not and cannot see. Living a life of faith.

What will be today and tomorrow awaits you. It is said that when Martin Luther was asked what he would do if he knew Christ were to return tomorrow, he responded that he would go out and plant a tree. What will be today and tomorrow awaits us. During this season, live in faith and hope.

Come Lord Jesus. Help us live the hope that only you can provide. Increase our faith and show us ways to live that faith during this busy season. Come Lord Jesus. Amen

Thursday – Juel Pierce

*Lost in the night do the people yet languish,
longing for morning, the darkness to vanquish,
plaintively sighing with hearts full of anguish,
Will not day come soon? Will not day come soon?*

*Must we be vainly awaiting the morrow?
Shall those who have light no light let us borrow,
giving no heed to our burden of sorrow?
Will you help us soon? Will you help us soon?*

*Sorrowing wanderers, in darkness yet dwelling,
dawned has the day of a radiance excelling,
death's deepest shadows forever dispelling.
Christ is coming soon! Christ is coming soon!*

*Light o'er the land of the needy is beaming;
rivers of life through its deserts are streaming,
bringing all peoples a Savior redeeming.
Come and save us soon! Come and save us soon!*

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If your idea of Advent is candles, shopping, music, light, cookies, food, family, this Advent hymn may come as a surprise. It is the “plaintive sighing” of those who have been too long in darkness. I think of refugees, who have lived in terror so fearful that their only thought is of leaving their homes so that they can find the uncertain safety of life on the road or in a foreign land. I think of families in the hospital, waiting to see if their loved one will survive the night. I remember and think of long nights of sleeplessness, seeing and hearing each chime of the clock or watching each turn of the hour, wondering if morning will ever come. Fear, sorrow, waiting for they are not sure what will come.

Advent begins this way. Sometimes with cries of pain, sometimes with tears of sorrow, sometimes with the silence of dread for what is unknown. We all can identify with the bridesmaids who had no oil for their lamps (Matthew 25:1-13), and nowhere to get it. And then comes the cry, “The bridegroom is coming!” What are they to do?

What are we to do when we are dwelling in darkness, not sure what will happen next, and unable to see even that morning might be coming. And then comes the first light of dawn, with the promise to us that Christ is coming soon! Christ brings hope for all who live in darkness. And Christ will not leave us without light and hope. For us who cannot provide our own light, the Bridegroom, Christ, brings a light that will show us the way home, to him! Christ brings us hope, even when we are hopeless.

Friday – Misty Coyle

*All of the angels lifted up their voices,
And filled the night with Hallelujah's,
God is with us now,
Everyone come and join the heavenly chorus,
Our Savior King is here before us,
All to hear the sound
The song creation sang
When Hope Came Down,
So let us sing Redemption Song,
Let us worship Christ the Holy one,
We were lost, but we were found,*

*When Hope Came Down,
When Hope Came Down.*

“When Hope Came Down”, Ben Glover, Kari Jobe

When we say, “I hope this happens”, hope is a word meant as a wish. The stronger the hope for something to happen is based on how strong our desire is for the wish to come true. In the bible, hope is the confident expectation of what God has promised and its strength is in His faithfulness. We can confidently expect things to happen as God has said because he has proven over and over, his faithfulness to us has never wavered. This song brings the feeling of confidence back to me especially when I feel confused or I am soured about the world around me. Especially at this time of the year.

When Jesus came, he came during a tumultuous time. He was also called many different names. Names, with about the same, meaning: “God With Us”. God was with the people of that time and he is with us at this time. He has never left; yet, we still ‘hope’ he comes again as if he left us. This song brings back the confidence in my heart God keeps his promises and is faithful to all of us in tumultuous times, joyful times, times of gladness, and in times of sorrow. My ‘wish’ is for all to have a confident heart growing in strength in the realization God is faithful. Our hope came down and we can forever sing Hallelujah for all to hear.

God with us, let our hearts sing your praises and let us always have hope in you. Amen!

Saturday – Rev. Roger Lenander

*We three kings of orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.*

"We Three Kings", also known as **"We Three Kings of Orient Are"** or **"The Quest of the Magi"**, is a Christmas carol that was written by John Henry Hopkins Jr. in 1857. At the time of composing the carol, Hopkins served as the rector of Christ Episcopal Church in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and he wrote the carol for a Christmas pageant in New York City, (Wikipedia)

Following the birth of Jesus, there arrive 3 kings (also referred to as wise men and magi) who are filled with wisdom and bearers of wealth. What a contrast to the poor young Joseph and Mary and the lowly shepherds. And here is the wisdom of God, that in a world of haves and have-nots the Hope that comes from God is the same. We offer to God what we have and who we are and bow before the Hope that is eternal in Jesus. We pray this Advent season that God would guide us to humble adoration of Jesus, the source of Hope for all people of all times and places.