

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes
Santa Barbara, CA**

First Sunday of Advent, Cycle C – December 2, 2012

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Reflections on **Jer 33:14-16; 1 Thes 3:12 – 4:2; Lk 21:25-28, 34-36**

Several years ago I became convinced that the US was a culture in decline and the middle class was targeted for obsolescence. I had no hope that anything would change. A friend thought I needed to change my reading matter and offered to send me a copy of a magazine named “Hope.” I subscribed to “Hope” magazine, filled out the little card and sent it off. About a week later, I received a note informing me that “Hope” was out of business.

Well, that publisher didn't know about Advent and I guess I didn't either. Advent *is* hope. Hope *does* exist. We are Christians who *believe*—who believe in something greater than ourselves: something that transcends the hate, the failure, the mess that humans can inflict upon others, and on all creation.

Advent hope anticipates the One who can bring peace and justice to our world. So we celebrate Advent, God's breaking into our history to offer redemption.

Today is our First Sunday of Advent, the day hope begins anew in our lives. We'll read Luke's gospel, we'll use a new liturgical color, and we'll have a quickening of anticipation in our hearts. Advent can overcome whatever darkness we may be holding onto. Advent will pierce the darkness of the season through the glorious light of Christ.

Through the readings tonight, we join with others who, so long ago, were also watching, waiting and praying in anticipation of the coming of the divine into their lives.

Jeremiah speaks to the Jewish people, assuring them that Yahweh will keep his promise for a land of peace and justice. Paul and Luke both write in the context of the Second Coming, something the 1st century Christians anticipated would happen in their lifetimes. All three

readings seek to encourage their listeners and readers to be faithful, on watch, to be prepared.

Our 21st century experience is different. We know Jesus has come. Jesus is alive in our hearts. We celebrate a truth about God, that Jesus is God and what we await is ... an amazing event. The first Advent of Jesus the Christ ... as a baby! A helpless infant who was the Son of God! The Savior of the World! The One who loves us beyond our ability or vocabulary to describe.

How do we take that in? It's a stunning moment, an overwhelming moment when you think about it. We *need* Advent. I've come to think that Advent has an element of selfishness. Not in the common sense but in the sense that we are given the time to anticipate and prepare, to listen to ourselves and awaken all the love we feel, and open our hearts to welcome God's gift. Our hope, our desire is to be renewed, to be personally reconciled to God, to have an Advent rebirth in the faith we proclaim.

I asked a few friends of mine to think of what words and images come to mind when they think of Advent. These were men, women, traditional Catholics, Episcopalians, and our Beatitudes Community.

No surprise that our love for ritual was very popular. Many instantly thought of candles in the darkness, the Advent wreath, the Advent calendar, the sign of something new happening with the change of our liturgical color. Things do look different, don't they?

Avoiding the intrusion of Christmas was mentioned by some. We can all understand that. It is difficult with Santas, decorated trees, Christmas carols broadcast through the shopping malls. Maybe the safety of our homes can be an Advent haven – a haven where there's a nativity

scene with shepherds and angels – and an empty manger waiting for the the Son of God. We need to find a place for Advent.

The two words “slow down” were also mentioned. This is a good way to do that waiting which is ahead of us. My favorite image of slowing down is a sight I often see when I walk in Shoreline Park: adult children holding hands or locking arms with an elderly parent. They walk slowly, Mom or Dad setting the pace, frequently stopping to laugh at a puppy or look out over the ocean. Advent people slowing down because they are in love.

Maybe I go for a walk, alone, what I call my “cosmos” walk. God's mountains embrace us; God's rain anoints us; God's signature is everywhere. A singular walk is an action that can slow us down literally and emotionally.

“Darkness” was an important answer from many people. The shortness of days has come so quickly. This darkness is important for Advent. We've all had times of darkness in our lives when we can't – or even won't – move on

because we're afraid, confused, alone, depressed. But we need to experience that darkness. It is the pain in our lives that teaches us compassion for one another and increases our love for the Christ within all of God's people.

Isaiah, the great poet of Hebrew scripture, gives us the words for those times:

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.”

Advent takes us to that light.

And then there were those who spoke from their longing. “... as long as there are those who are in pain or imprisoned, I am neither healed nor free.” And, “There is something in me that is waiting to be in awe yet once again.” Finally, “... I want to hear the voice of the Christ within me.”

Advent is the Good News of our Salvation.

Amen.