

SERMON- Advent 2 (C)

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Baruch 5:1-9

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

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Canticle 16 (Luke 1:68-79)

OPENING:

Before he was famous, George Clooney was a struggling actor living in L.A. One afternoon he was playing pickup basketball with a group of fellow Hollywood wannabees. After the game, he talked with a teammate, Bill Lawrence, about their respective careers.

The friend said he had been working on and off...

but *had* started writing for a show about 20 somethings living in New York City.

Clooney said he likewise had been working on and off but...

had just been cast in a show about doctors set in an Emergency Room hospital in Chicago.

Lawrence asked Clooney: "What's your show called?"

"it's called *ER*.... What's YOUR show called?"

Lawrence replied:

"... it's called *Friends*...."

ADVENT

I tell that story because that sense of hope and expectation, of dreaming and fear, being on the verge of something big, but also struggling through interminable waiting.

That, friends, is Advent.

Advent's not in the Bible, it's not something that Jesus told us to do, or even John the Baptist told us to do precisely.

It means literally "Coming" or "Arrival and it's a creation of the Church to help us prepare for the "Coming" or "Arrival" of the Christ Child.

Importantly, it's also when we prepare for the Second Coming, the eschatological banquet at the end of times and God's judgement of his people.

We know all the familiar definitions.

Advent is a season of preparation and waiting and expectation, of anticipation and hope.

When we start to talk about it like though, it becomes tough to get at when put in that way. I start to like my first example more or more and I want to keep asking: "WHAT IS ADVENT?"

ADVENT POLICE

To try to help answer that question, the Advent Police are always out in full force, Do you know about the Advent police?

They say: “No Christmas Carols before Christmas” and that sort of thing.

If they had been here last week, they would have chided Abigail Smith, age 8, for showing up on Advent One with a Santa’s cap on.

They might have chided many of you for wearing red, the color of Christmas last week.

The Advent Police get concerned about which candle on the wreath gets lit first, when and where we light the pink one?

The Advent Police long for the color purple and its connection with Lent and wonder how this mysterious blue has entered into the season as a dominant color.

In the end, the Advent Police don’t really help the Church or our confused culture to answer our question: “what is Advent?”

Maybe it’s because Advent is complex.

I once heard a speaker on mental health say that in America, we are an “-AD society.”

That is, we are either “mad, glad or sad” and we cannot really wrap our brains or express emotions that go beyond those first order understandings of life.

Advent is an attempt to get beyond that, to understand life as a bit more complicated than that, to get at the realest thing in this whole wide cosmos

That’s the season and posture that we are being called into, a season of hope and pain, and waiting and arrival, of joy and absence.

Advent is all those things.

So no simplistic Advent Police, no easy answers from the Bible, and let’s keep asking: “WHAT IS ADVENT?”

SHRINE MONT

Advent is my favorite season, I think,

and so here’s an example of it from my favorite place: Shrine Mont Camp.

Every Summer, about midway through the session with the kids, we would celebrate Christmas... in July.

It would begin with counselors, getting up early in the morning before the wake-up bell, gathering and serenading each cabin with Christmas Carols.

Imagine yourself a nine-year-old child, sleeping out in the woods, away from home. And hearing these carols being sung in the middle of Summer...

That moment of recognition by a young person, half-asleep, disoriented in adolescent slumber in their bunks...That's Advent.

The realization that something strange is going on, something different, that life is about to change. That's Advent.

All throughout the camp day, we would go on to do Christmas things, in our worship services and in giving gifts, and singing songs.

But that moment in the morning, as they hear a loud "Merry Christmas" and they are roused out of the normal pattern of a camp day, the sound bouncing off the mountains and into their skulls. That rousing is Advent.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

That sound is indeed, to get finally to our Gospel, a "voice crying in the wilderness."

It pierces the air and calls us to wake up.

It's the message of John the Baptist and all the prophets throughout the ages who have said in different ways:

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord"

"Christ is coming"

"Aslan is on the move"

"the road is being leveled"

"salvation is at hand."

There's this really famous work of art, called the Isenheim Altarpiece and it depicts a crucified Jesus, in all the typical Medieval gore and blood, with Mary to Christ's right weeping, and John the Baptist to Christ's left.

John the Baptist is holding his scroll in one hand and pointing to Jesus in the other.

That's an anachronism, the Advent police would get involved here, because John the Baptist was dead by the time of the Crucifixion,

But the point is that John the Baptist is pointing to Jesus.

That's John the Baptist's role, his vocation, and that's the role and our vocation in Advent.

I said on Wednesday that I like Advent better than Lent because you don't have to do anything—no giving up, no taking on—you just wait and point to the thing that you are waiting for. Our job is to point is to point out that light in the darkness.

THE CLOSET

"What is Advent?" here's another example... this one closer to home.

You probably know about The Closet, the non-profit in downtown Herndon founded by St. Tim's and other churches that offers affordable clothing and household items to those in need.

WUSA, Channel 9, recently did a segment on The Closet, how it's celebrating its 50th Year in 2024 and how these two volunteers, husband and wife, have devoted their lives to working there in retirement.¹

Great segment, I put it up on our Facebook page.

If you want a modern-day definition of Advent, watch it later.

The couple in the segment said that they had worked their whole lives for the government but had never really touched anyone. But now, with The Closet, in retirement, they woke up, they found their calling.

It's an amazing story of an Arrival, of a Coming to, after a long wait.

That's one part of it... the other part is that our own Holly Hartge suggested it to Channel 9.

She pointed at the thing that we need to look at. She was so modest she used her given name Mary.

She was being John the Baptist, pointing at God's saving grace, how Christ has coming, is coming, and will come into this world.

CONCLUSION:

Now at seminary, we were told that sometimes a sermon illustration can overwhelm the point, that the listeners can be so inspired by the finger rather than what you are pointing out.

All you will remember is George Clooney and basketball. Or even The Closet

There was once a preacher, earlier on at his tenure at a certain church, who gave a dynamic sermon where he tried on lots of hats.... For years people would compliment him on that sermon. The only problem was that pretty soon neither the parishioners nor the preacher could remember what the point of trying on all the hats was.

The preacher's job, all of our jobs as Christians living in Advent, is to point to Christ,

to say "don't look at me." Don't give up on anything, don't take on anything.

Instead, "look at God's abiding love breaking through in the world. Can you see it?" That's Advent's.

Usually we fail but maybe we sometimes get a glimpse, every once in a while, *through a glass darkly*.

¹ [Virginia couple using retirement to make an impact | The Heart of It | wusa9.com](https://www.wusa9.com)

What is Advent? It's the realization that...

We cannot be Jesus, so let's just try to be John the Baptist and point at the thing, to sound the alarm clocks, to sing the songs, to live our lives in that sense of anticipation.

AMEN