



THE NEW SHOFAR

*Advent, the season of darkness, gives rise to light, ever increasing.
While we wait, we hope...and we light candles and pray that the
world around us may walk in that Light.*

Advent 1

The Son of Man is coming on the clouds...

I find it truly amazing just how much has been written about the End of the world, the time of the return of the Son of Man as judge of all. There has been an over-abundance of such (failed) prophecies by all kinds of men and women pointing to this day, or that day or some specific time in the future. They claim to be reading the “signs of the times,” but they may as well have been reading tea leaves in a cup for all the good it has done them. They were all wrong then and they are all wrong today. How do I know that? Because Jesus himself did not know the day and told us how it was something the Father alone knew. It will come. But it will come in God’s time.

What do we do in the meantime?

There is a great scene in the Acts of the Apostles, where Jesus gives his final instructions to the Apostles. That completed, he ascends into heaven. While the apostles are standing there, looking up to heaven, an angel appears and asks them: *What on earth are you standing there looking up into heaven? Get back to Jerusalem, there is work to be done!*

It is this “work” of which the angel spoke that remains our responsibility. In the language of Jesus what is required of us is abundantly clear *Jesus commissioned His disciples to be His witnesses. He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20). Note the key commands:*

- They were to be **witnesses** to Jesus for the world. This is our primary ministry and everything else grows out of this witness.
- *Go make **disciples**...*The primary vocation of the Christian is not focussed on getting themselves to heaven. It is about bringing others to Christ so that they rejoice in a personal union in Jesus their Messiah. So that their lives are enriched by divine grace.

Biblical witnessing means giving a *living* testimony to the Truth – that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave. He lives and what was available to the world when he walked in and around Jerusalem is available to people today. This message is proclaimed by the way the Christian(s) lives, speaks, acts in the world. Others experience the Living Christ through the witness of the believer.

- Christians are to reach out to everyone they encounter, include in their Christian family those who are searching for meaning, mercy, love and forgiveness.
- How on earth can we possibly manage all of that? Because of the promise of Jesus...*I am with you always*... This witnessing, this life of discipleship is not something we can manage on our own. But we do not have to. Jesus does it in us and through us. We plant the seeds but God does the growing.

What about the Jesus who has already come?

Advent, of course, is also about celebrating the first coming of Jesus as Lord – Christmas. This is not a secondary thought but is part and parcel of the return of Jesus as the Son of Man. The reality for us today, is that Jesus never left us...*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*. Christians today reach out to the Living Christ in the “other”. We know he is in them. We just need to get beyond the surface characteristics of the person that might put us off or offend us. The Christ in us engages with the Christ in the “other”. Complicated but the exciting reality.

What that means is that we are not bringing Christ to the world, because he never left the world. What we do with our witnessing and our lives as disciples is help others to find the living Christ in their midst. The world can first of all find this living Christ in us. By our love for them; by the way we include them, respect them and embrace them as Jesus would embrace them.

Herein is our Advent vocation

Advent is a call to action. It is not just about making Christmas preparations, though that can be great fun and satisfying. It is a time for pondering what it means to have Christ born to us at Christmas. How does that birth transform us, enliven us and empower the way we go about our daily activities? Why is Christmas a blessing for the world in which we live? If we cannot answer these questions, how will we be able to convince others of the value of following the way of Jesus?

Repent is the biblical word for the Advent challenge. That word means actively turning towards God, turning from the things of this world that crowd God out of what we do and distract us from our baptismal vocations. These things are not all sinful, but they can replace the priority God should have in our daily lives.

Why repent? Because we are preparing ourselves for our 2022 mission and ministry. If the incarnation of Jesus as the Christ of God means anything to us, then we will want to share our joy with others, that they too can be free and find peace and meaning in their lives. Once again, baptism is not entirely about ourselves. It is about collaborating with God in the transformation of our world.

How do we show our repentance? Through faithful living. Through striving to be more faithful in our daily prayers, our reading of the Scriptures and our engagement with our brothers and sisters in the parish. And here is an important part of repenting: loving our fellow parishioners and showing that love that they may know God’s love.