

HOW DESPERATELY WE NEED ADVENT!

Every year, it seems the Christmas season rushes upon us with little warning. Summer, Fall, Christmas — only faster! And now it's happened again.

“Advent” is the proper term for this segment of the church year. Literally, the term means “coming,” and signals the main event — the *Lord's* coming.

During Advent we remember the Lord Jesus' *first* coming. As we may observe in these weeks, Mark's gospel especially alerts us to beware a surface or cosmetic celebration of Jesus' coming. Serious, indeed, is the Messiah's mission. He came to expose the truth in deep, penetrating ways. The problem with the world and its people — the problem with me — is sin that robs God of His central role in our lives and hinders us from being the people He created us to be. The first coming of Jesus Messiah exposes this deep, core problem, and offers the solution.

But, as we may also observe, Matthew's gospel especially shows us that the solution Jesus brings comes as an intrusion into our lives and world. When God entered the picture few, if any, really expected Him, and His arrival was disruptive. In fact, not one of the characters in the story can carry on with life as usual. Everything comes to a halt and then to a new beginning when God is with us in Jesus. The disruption of God's arrival highlights how all-important the coming of God is. History — the world's and ours — hinges on His coming. What we do in response to His arrival is the most important decision we will ever face. Will we call a halt to everything long enough for Him to enter our world, to deal with our sinful condition, and to make us new people?

During Advent we remember the Lord's Jesus' first coming while we wait for His *fresh* coming. For us, Jesus' coming cannot remain a history lesson. We long for Him to be among us in *these* days — surprising us with intrusive force, penetrating our hearts and relationships, bringing the medicines of grace, mercy and love to heal us and our world. A mere stirring of our emotions will not do. Nor will the creation of new scrapbook memories. We need His *fresh* arrival and ministry among us, probably more than we realize. The world also longs for His coming, though dimly perceiving the nature of its longing, if at all. Only God-present-with-us will suffice for a world full of need.

And, during Advent, we place our hope in Jesus' *final* coming. While in one sense Jesus finished His work, there remains much to do if His world has its full effect. One day, perhaps soon, history will climax as His story concludes with His final appearing. The writer of Hebrews tells us that this coming will not be to secure the solution to our problems. He's already done that! Rather, His final coming will restore the cosmos fully, providing a new heaven and earth for those who welcome His coming and confirming the terrible choice others have made to reject Him.

Advent celebrations have an air of urgency about them. We dare not settle for a sweet, but surface celebration, letting baby Jesus merely warm our hearts on the way to a new year. No, His first coming urges us to seek His fresh coming — could anything be more important, more worth the intrusion, than the Holy One breaking into our world — here and now? Indeed, how urgent that He do so, in light of His certain final coming!

O Holy Child of Bethlehem

Descend to us we pray,

Cast out our sin and enter in,

Be born in us today . . .

again, and again, and again. Everything depends on it!