



President Walton's December 2018 Message

Advent - Are You Ready?



Dear Friends,

It is always an amazing thing to see how frantic things become as we approach Christmas. With a flurry of activities, school and church events, special musical concerts, and, of course, shopping, it's no wonder people get tired and depressed around the holidays. The demands are real and often overwhelming. It can become so easy to lose sight of priorities and what these weeks leading up to Christmas are really all about. Yes, there is baking to do, shopping to do, cleaning to do, decorating and the list goes on and on.

However, this season is really about experiencing again the joy of our new life in Jesus!

Maybe you've heard the story about a woman doing her last-minute Christmas shopping at a crowded mall. She was tired of fighting the crowds, standing in long lines, and fighting her way down long aisles looking for a gift that had sold out days before. She was sick and tired of Christmas and wanted it to be done. Her arms were filled with bulky packages when the elevator door opened. Of course it was full. Still, the occupants of the elevator grudgingly tightened ranks to allow a small space for her and her load to enter. As the doors closed she blurted out, *"Whoever is responsible for this whole Christmas thing out to be arrested, strung up, and shot!"* Many have felt that way. Several on the elevator nodded their heads or grunted in agreement. Then, from somewhere in the back of the elevator came a single voice that said, *"Don't worry. They already crucified him."* When we forget the real reason for the season we have a tendency to get a bit jaundiced about it.

That's where Christians may have a slight advantage. Celebrated as early as the 4th or 5th Century, the season of Advent is all about setting aside time to prepare for the celebration of God's gift of Jesus. From the Latin word for "coming", Advent anticipates the coming of Jesus both in the past, as He was incarnate (made flesh) as the baby Jesus. Advent also points us forward as we anticipate His triumphant return to take us home! Sometimes missed is the sense of Advent which focuses us on the present as we celebrate His presence with us in Word and Sacrament. Luther encouraged people to observe Advent as a time to teach children about the coming of Jesus. Today we can still do that through Advent Wreaths and Advent Calendars. Advent Devotions (you can get a daily devotion emailed to you—sign up at the District Website) can keep us focused. So do midweek Advent services. I love to see a sanctuary decorated for Christmas. It's so festive and joyful with candles and greenery.

The candles on the Advent Wreath also point us forward. Whether they are purple for royalty or blue for hope, the wreath helps us prepare. The first week, the Prophecy Candle or candle of hope, reminds us of the words of the prophets that foretold the coming of Jesus. The second candle, the Bethlehem Candle or candle of preparation, reminds us of the place that God prepared for the baby Jesus. The third candle, the pink one, the Shepherd's Candle or the candle of joy, reminds us of the joy the shepherds experienced

as they learned God's plan of salvation and that a Savior had been born for them. The fourth candle, the Angel Candle or the candle of love, reminds us of God's love announced by the angels, which is still heralded today among us. The final candle, the white Christ Candle, lit on Christmas Eve, reminds us of Jesus, the Light of the world! What a glorious time of celebration this can be!



When I was in college I worked in a retail store selling high end men's suits. At times it was non-stop traffic, but there were also times when things were quiet, almost boring. My boss would tell me that there was always plenty to do. Straighten the racks, make sure the shirts were folded properly. Dust the displays. Ugh! I would have to admit there were times when I stood around doing nothing or chatting with fellow workers. Whenever we would hear our boss coming near the phrase was, "Look busy, the boss is coming." I have often been guilty, in regard to my faith in Jesus, to also occupy my time with less than evangelical things. Advent always forces me to think, "What will you do while you're waiting for Jesus?" The truth is, there's no end to what can be done. All around us we find social injustice and hatred, sinful attitudes and actions that draw us away from our faith and from receiving the good news of a Savior born for us! God has chosen each of us to be His own child, and He empowers us to make a difference in the world for the sake of Jesus. It's really as simple as telling the real story of Christmas to a world that thinks it's all about Santa Claus. We know it's all about Jesus!

As the Florida-Georgia District celebrates 70 years of blessings, there is plenty each of us can do. We are in the early days of our 70 years-\$70 campaign, inviting people across the Florida-Georgia District to give a one-time gift of \$70 to the District's Mission Loan fund that will live on perpetually to serve the mission of Jesus in the Florida-Georgia District. Our goal is to raise up two new ministries in each of the five regions of the district each year for the next five years. This will result in a minimum of 50 new ministry starts. Let me translate that into an awesome potential. Let's say that each new ministry start reached only 25 people. That would mean 1250 people who didn't know Jesus can rejoice in eternal life! Even if all those potential new ministries reached only one person, that one matters to Jesus, and so should matter to us!

What will you do during these days of Advent, as we await the coming of Jesus? Can you sing a Christmas Carol that tells of His love? Can you point people to the meaning behind some of the decorations and lights that reflect the Light of the World? Can you make some extra cookies that can be given to those who have no food? There are many things that all of us can do to make a difference while we wait. Maybe it's planting a new church, or formulating plans for a new ministry that proclaims Jesus through service and care. How can you be part of the vision to build God's kingdom and plant new ministries right where God already has you?

Advent is the perfect time to think and pray, but also to spring into action to serve Jesus. What will you do while you look for His coming? He's coming back soon! Let's take time to prepare and to celebrate the joy of His first coming by connecting others to Jesus!

Have a wonderful Advent season as we anticipate a Merry Christmas!

In His peace,

Greg

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Upcoming Events

[National Interim Pastor Training February 18 - 22, 2019](#)

[2019 FLGA School Music Festival February 22, 2019](#)

[Veterans of the Cross, March 4-6, 2019](#)



[Link to Lutheran Life District NewsMagazine](#)

