

**Sunday, December 1, 2019 – First Sunday in Advent**  
**“Urgency and Certainty”**

Isaiah 2: 2-5

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Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Having just come off Thanksgiving perhaps you are still feeling the effects, not to mention eating the leftovers of the foods that makes your house a home for the holidays: pumpkin pie, stuffing and so much turkey. There are just certain things you expect and it wouldn't be the same if they weren't there.

But it was a short-long week. The Thanksgiving feasting was followed by “Black Friday,” the highest volume retail shopping day of the year and now we cannot avoid it – Christmas time is officially coming. Radio stations are playing Christmas music 24/7 through Christmas day. “A Christmas Story” with little Ralphie in desperate pursuit of his Red Ryder Carbine-Action 200 Shot Air Rifle has already been on TV at least once with a 100 or so more showings to come.

And now, Christmas is coming! But first we start our new year with Advent with a message of great urgency and the certainty that not only is Christmas is coming but the very purpose for which Christmas occurred is also upon us and always just around the corner.

Listen to Isaiah – “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.”

Listen to Paul – “Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

Listen to Jesus – “Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Now here's the twist, so listen very carefully – just like coming home for the holidays there are certain things you expect – a batch of fudge, sugar cookies with frosting and sprinkles, every decoration exactly as you remember it and where it belongs – and it just wouldn't be the same without them – God is working on a homecoming, he's preparing a feast, and the

ingredients to make his house a home is you and me and every human soul he has created and longs to spend eternity with – and it won't be the same without them.

God is creating His family right here at Mountain View, one part of a family he is creating for a glorious homecoming when Jesus comes again and we stream to Zion, we stream to Jesus. Right now he is seeking the missing ingredients – your neighbor, your friend or family member - to complete His family recipe and time is drawing short. Jesus will return and no one knows the day or the hour, but it is closer now than it has ever been before.

There is a moment in time coming when the last ingredient – every soul that can possibly be saved will be gathered into the family – and then the glory of heaven will break forth upon us. It is kind of daunting to think of it that way – but God's word is clear – he wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

It seems so endless – it seems so hopeless. At the rate we are going Jesus may never come back. Do you remember the movie “National Treasure”? Nicolas Cage's character – Benjamin Franklin Gates – believes in the existence of a National Treasure. He has committed his life – every ounce of his being to discovering its location. His father once felt that way too – but he has given up. His conclusion – there is no treasure – there never was a treasure – the story of the treasure was invented to distract the enemy and send them on a wild goose chase. Every clue simply leads to another clue and then another and then another, but there is no treasure at the end. It is easy to get discouraged. It's even easier to get distracted, especially this time of year. Sometimes I wonder if this whole Christianity thing is even real. Maybe it was invented by clever men just to distract us from the reality of the mess this world is in and there is nothing at the end.

Oh for the faith of Philipp Nicolai. Philipp Nicolai was a Pastor in Germany during the Bubonic Plague – no less than 1400 people died in the first seven months of 1597. And he wrote “Wake, Awake for night is flying” as “the token of my peaceful, joyful, Christian departure (if God should call me from the world) or (if God should spare me in health) to comfort other sufferers.” This Advent God is calling us back to just such a faith – to the truth – to His reality – and it is urgent and absolutely certain.

This much is true, fixed without possibility of change – that Jesus is God, born into human flesh as an infant – to lead us to Zion – not the mountain in Israel but to Jesus, our temple, our source of salvation. He lived perfectly in obedience and trust in the heavenly Father. He suffered and died and because He was true God His suffering and death is the punishment we all deserve. At the cross Jesus destroyed sin. Then He rose again from the dead and destroyed death once and for all so that all would stream to Him and be saved.

Yes, the wait is hard but God is collecting every single person who will believe – a worthwhile reason to wait. Listen to God speaking in 2 Peter, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

The hidden message of this first week of Advent is this: Urgency and Certainty. Now is the time for us to gather God’s family, bring them home to Mountain View for the holidays so they will stream to Zion, to Jesus – invite, invite, invite – there is no time like Christmas to bring people to church. People are more open, more receptive, more willing to come – even for the wrong reasons – let God worry about their motivation – you get them in the front door and let God’s Holy Spirit take over from there.

A man named Scott Edlin saw that urgency. He’s a member at our sister church, Faith Community. He designed those “Luke 2” shirts that maybe you’ve seen people wearing – covered in potential conversation starters about Jesus, about Christmas, about the story, to give people a reason for the hope that we have. This year there was a push to turn Black Friday into “bright Friday,” by wearing that shirt out shopping and eating around the community and shedding the light of Jesus.

Shirt or not, there are plenty of easy ways to invite. This Wednesday and every Wednesday in December – Advent midweek worship and soup suppers, next Sunday, Lessons and Carols for our Advent worship, the next Saturday – Breakfast with Santa; then our Sunday School Christmas program on the 15<sup>th</sup> – anyone’s kids can participate with all the prep time of the hour before the service. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, our Elementary Christmas program, the 19<sup>th</sup>, our Preschool tells the Christ story, the Sunday before Christmas, caroling to our community, and then the service on Christmas Eve at 7; one on Christmas Day at 9:30 – and there are two more Sunday mornings in the Christmas season this year, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, (December 29 and January 5, respectively), to celebrate Christ’s birth.

Urgency and Certainty: the hidden message of this first week of Advent – We are forgiven for the doubt and distraction – that robs us of the heart pounding joy of being in on and essential ingredients in God’s adventure for the salvation of the world.

Urgency and Certainty: the hidden message of this first week of Advent – behind the sights and sounds and even the smells of holiday recipes God renews us again to open hearts and minds – to see the moment of salvation that He has prepared right here and right now – and God would have all stream home to Jesus for the holidays. In Jesus’ name, Amen.