

## From the Pastor



*“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”*  
Luke 21:27-28

The new Christmas Tree at church is up. And I can tell you, it was worth the drive through Chicago last January, fighting traffic, fighting faulty hours posted on a website, battling wrong directions to get to the proper location, and finally loading the truck down with 4 giant boxes full of what set up to be this new tree that adorns the sanctuary during the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Thanks to all who accomplished this task in the sanctuary. Now if only setting up other decorations would be as rewarding and exciting. It always seems that there is never enough time to get them up, and soon after, they are being taken back down again for another year.

I do tend to get a bit edgy when people tend to “rush” Christmas - you know, starting after Halloween, and ending Christmas day. My biggest problem is not the societal war on Christmas. I am, after all, thankful that many Americans continue to fight back for maintaining a public, open proclamation of the real reason for the season. My problem is not even that decorations go up too early, although some might argue this to be the case. My issue is with those who think that December is the season of Christmas. It is not. The four weeks leading up to December 25 (which itself is an arbitrary date and likely NOT the actual birth of the Messiah) are really a totally different season. Christmas runs 12 days, as the song implies, and BEGINS on December 25, not ends.

The month of December is the season of Advent: a bridge between the long season of Pentecost and the season of Christmas. Advent, the season of the church that we will now celebrate, is not only a time of preparation for the upcoming season of Christmas, but a look ahead to Christ’s return as well. If we are indeed to prepare for it, what better way than to insure that our religious freedom is also preserved - that we can celebrate the season as we choose, in public and not in private. It is a time in which, while we remember Jesus’ birth, we also remember that he promises to return. The very word “Advent” means “a coming or arrival.” The word embodies in it the promise of Christ, made to the disciples and all that he would one day return.

Now I am not advocating that we cease and desist all Christmas activities until the end of December. But as we decorate, also think of the Gospel’s message and meaning for us, and recognize that God’s gift of life and salvation is a fantastic one. Recall his promise to return, and marvel at God, who calls us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So go ahead and decorate. Go ahead and celebrate. All that the Spirit of Christmas embodies is good for the American soul. Let’s hope that the spirit of Christmas changes our society for the better. But leave up your trees and decorations during Christmas too. Take December to recall Jesus’ words to return, and reflect on that this Advent season. Focus on the seven marks of the church as we walk through them in December, and ask of yourselves, “are these things embodied in our worship, our practices, and our lives?” Since this is also the time to give thanks, offer to God your humble thanksgiving for all that he has done in sending his Son and in promising his return. God bless you all in Advent, Christmas, and throughout the year.

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