

# First Sunday of Advent

CHOIR MEMBERS are likely thinking, “How can it be Advent already? The time just flies! It seems like the last Advent-Christmas-Epiphany season ended just a few weeks ago!”

The choir director is likely thinking, “If last Advent seems so recent to them, why don’t they seem to remember the music we are repeating from last year?”

Choir members and choir director are all likely thinking, “Life will be a blur for the next few weeks.”

To all of us, Jesus is saying, “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down.” He does go on to specifically mention “dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life”—things we would do well to avoid at all times. But surely, we can easily become weighed down by an excess of good things, too—an excessive number of greetings to send and gifts to give, an excessive number of guests to entertain with an excessive amount of food. We may place too many expectations on others and on ourselves and even on the church to make our holiday season meaningful to us.

Let’s not forget the central themes of Advent. Christ came at a specific time in history; Christ will come again in great glory at a time only God knows. In the meanwhile, Christ continues to come to us over and over in word and sacrament, in prayer and fellowship, and in deeds of love and mercy. It’s not all up to us—thank God! Being involved and effective without getting weighed down is our charge. After that, it’s all grace. By all means, this Advent season, don’t forget the grace!

Let us pray with the words of hymnwriter Susan Palo Cherwien:

Shine your future on this place,  
 enlighten every guest,  
 that through us stream your holiness,  
 bright and blest, bright and blest;  
 come dawn, O Sun of grace. Amen.

## READINGS AND PSALM

Jeremiah 33:14-16

*A righteous branch springs from David*

Psalm 25:1-10

*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. (Ps. 25:1)*

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

*Strengthen hearts of holiness*

Luke 21:25-36

*Watch for the coming of the Son of Man*

## REHEARSAL NOTES

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

---



---



---



---

## Second Sunday after Epiphany

CHOIR MEMBERS know how much work and time it takes to prepare the music we present each week. We repeat each piece numerous times, often taking it apart and spending several minutes focusing on the pronunciation of a single vowel, or the intonation of a single chord, or the precision of a single rhythmic pattern. A minute of music sung in worship may easily be the result of an hour or more spent on it in rehearsal. This “hidden” part of what we do as singers, instrumentalists, and directors often goes unnoticed and unappreciated by those in the congregation and sometimes even by those in our church offices and in our own homes. We can and should try to illuminate others about what we have to do in order to accomplish what we accomplish; but, for the most part, those hidden hours will likely remain hidden to all but a few—and to God, of course. The rest at least experience the results of our time and efforts, and that is what we are all about anyway.

During this season—the Sundays after Epiphany—the gospel readings are filled with stories of Jesus’ life and work as he became known to the people of his day. He was becoming less hidden with each passing day. The event that is known as “the first of his signs” took place in Cana of Galilee. The setting is a very famous wedding—not famous for the celebrity bride or groom, for their names are not even recorded—but famous for this one guest who did something miraculous. At Jesus’ command, plain water was turned instantly into good wine—some very good wine, as the report goes, and lots and lots of it. The gospel writer narrates the events and quotes the conversations, but he has nothing to say about *how* this miracle was accomplished or *why* Jesus decided this was the time and place for his first public miracle. That behind-the-scenes part of the story was—and still is—hidden.

While that may be aggravating to some, we should try to see it as comforting to know that there is much we are not expected to understand. If we could fathom all the workings of God and of God’s creation, God would be nothing more than a very smart human being. We want—and need—more than that in a God. And what has been revealed in Jesus *is* a God much more than what our imaginations can comprehend. Even though each new day reveals more of the glory and grace of God, much more is still hidden and still waits to be revealed.

We pray with hymnwriter Christopher Idle:

Jesus, come! surprise our dullness, make us willing to receive  
 more than we can yet imagine, all the best you have to give:  
 let us find your hidden riches, taste your love, believe, and live! Amen.

READINGS AND PSALM

Isaiah 62:1-5

*God like the bridegroom and the bride*

Psalm 36:5-10

*We feast upon the abundance of your house, O LORD. (Ps. 36:8)*

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

*A variety of gifts but one Spirit*

John 2:1-11

*The wedding at Cana*

REHEARSAL NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ANNOUNCEMENTS

---

---

---

---

## Eighth Sunday after Epiphany

WHAT ARE we doing here? Many of us have been coming to worship and choir rehearsals so long and so regularly that it may have been a long time since we asked ourselves the question “what am I doing here?” A hymn by Dutch hymnwriter Huub Oosterhuis allows us to ask such questions and then to give some answers. We sing:

What is this place where we are meeting?

The first part of the answer is rather modest and straightforward:

Only a house, the earth its floor.

Walls and a roof sheltering people, windows for light, an open door.

But the answer does not stop at the merely visual description. It takes deeper perception to sing the rest of that stanza:

Yet it becomes a body that lives when we are gathered here,  
and know our God is near.

Yes, that is what this place we call “church” is all about—a people who are transformed into a living body by the presence of God. Our music plays an integral part in becoming and being that living body that revels in the presence of God.

This Sunday’s gospel reads somewhat like a summary, as a string of short parables pours out of Jesus’ mouth. We hear of blind persons leading blind persons, specks and logs in eyes, trees that bear fruit (or not), and a comparison of houses built on rock versus those built on sand. To the last of these parables, Jesus provides an introduction. He says, “I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them.”

That sounds an awful lot like what we do when we come for worship. In our gathering, we come to Christ. In readings, sermons, and songs we hear Christ’s words. And in offering, praying, sharing bread and wine, and going forth, we are putting into action the words of Christ. In the hymnwriter’s words again, we sing:

We in this place remember and speak again what we have heard:

God’s free redeeming word. . . .

This is the place where we can receive what we need to increase:  
our justice and God’s peace.

So what are we doing here? We are choosing rock over sand as the building material of our lives. We are entering into the mystical, the dynamic, the transcendent, the hyper-reality that is worship.

Let us pray:

God, keep us mindful of the specialness of worship and of preparing for it. Help us remember why we are here and what it is we do here. Most importantly, help us know what it is YOU do here, as you gather us, teach us, feed us, and send us out to spread your justice and peace. Amen.



READINGS AND PSALM

Isaiah 55:10-13

*God's word goes forth*

or Sirach 27:4-7

*A tree's fruit discloses its cultivation*

Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15

*The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree. (Ps. 92:12)*

1 Corinthians 15:51-58

*The mystery of the resurrection*

Luke 6:39-49

*Building on a firm foundation*

REHEARSAL NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

ANNOUNCEMENTS

---

---

---

---

---