

# Opening the Word: The hidden coming

On Dec. 25, Christians throughout the world will direct their eyes to the crèche, remembering the birth of our infant Lord. In Bethlehem, hidden from all except the poor and lowly, God has pitched his tent among us.

How are we to prepare ourselves to recognize the wondrous gift of divine love in the speechless Word made flesh?

On this first Sunday of Advent, the Scriptures highlight the vigilance required for us to recognize the illuminating presence of Our Lord.

For Advent begins, not with the hidden babe, but the coming of the Son of Man. It begins with apocalypse, God's definitive judgment of the earth. During the end of days, there will be terrifying signs of discord, disharmony, a disturbed world.

Each generation can recognize the signs of this judgment. One need only see the threat of war looming over nations. To look with sober vigilance at the callousness through which human beings eliminate one another in the name of efficiency.

Perhaps, this is the age.

[First Sunday of  
Advent – Dec.  
2, 2018](#)

JER 33:14-16  
PS 25:4-5, 8-9,  
10, 14  
1 THES 3:12-4:2  
LK  
21:25-28,34,46

But Christ's point is that each generation should prepare like

this is the age of the second coming of Jesus: "Be vigilant at all times ..." (Lk 21:36). Be sober. Be upright. The dawning of the kingdom is at hand.

Where can we recognize the first dawning rays of this kingdom? St. Paul asks us to turn to the Church. Really? In this Church, embroiled in scandal? In this Church, ripped apart from conflicts between bishops?

But look closer. Look not for evidence of power but for the poverty of the crucified and risen Lord: "[M]ay the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ... to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his holy ones" (1 Thes 3:12-13).

The first signs of this judgment, of the coming of the Son of Man, can be seen in the smallest parish church.

There, the Son of Man comes through the poverty of human speech in the proclamation of the Word.

There, the Son of Man comes through the sometimes-harmonious voices of men and women who take seriously their vocation to adore the living God.

There, the Son of Man comes through his Eucharistic presence, transforming bread and wine into Body and Blood.

There, the Son of Man comes through the hungry, the thirsty, the immigrant, the prisoner and the homeless.

The season of Advent is a time to be attuned by God to the hidden presence of divine love. In the final judgment, it will only be those who recognized this presence who will join the communion of saints.

Those who spent their time trying to become God, to become powerful, who refused to bend the knee before the crucified Lord will be judged. They'll look at our Lord. They'll see

him. And they'll walk away without regret. They'll walk away because they don't recognize the hidden glory of a God who loves unto the end.

So, this Advent, let us turn our attention not to some glorious sign of divine power unfolding in our midst. Instead, let us prepare to greet the Christ whose advent is at hand.

Let us pray. Feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Adore the Blessed Sacrament. Care for the immigrant. Listen to the Scriptures.

If we do this, we'll be sure to recognize the final and definitive advent of the Son of Man.

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