

President's Piece for Peace

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Advent, Christmas, and New Year's all seem to run together don't they? In this day and time they run very, very fast. The effect is that they come and go before we really have a chance to absorb them and comprehend what they may or may not say.

Let's actually work backwards with these three. New Year's is not a festival of the Church Year, at least not a major festival. It has been taken over by the secular world with intentions of using it as a motivation for something new to be started or accomplished. Most of which fall by the wayside within a very short period of time. Solomon tells us that "*there is nothing new under the sun.*" (Ecclesiastes 1:9b) What has been will be and what is now has already been. New Year's is simply a marker in time as time marches on; there is nothing theologically new about it.

This is where a good understanding of Advent comes in. Advent is pointing us to something yet to come. Not to begrudge Solomon, but there will be something that is not yet now. Advent points us to the coming of Christ Jesus in His vast array of power and strength. He has come, this is true. He came to His creation in a tiny town. He lived in another town and then His life came to an end in yet another city. Because He came, there is yet something to come. It is a glorious thing that awaits us and it will bring about the New. Not a "New Year's", but a new existence for the redeemed that will not be marked in time but in eternity.

While Advent is a preparatory season for the festival of Christmas, it is more so a preparatory season for Jesus' return. Advent points us to the Church Year combination of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Just before Pentecost, Jesus ascended to heaven. He did so with the promise that He would be with us always until the end of time. There is indeed an end to time as we know it. It cannot be escaped nor do we want to escape it. Jesus' return marks the end of creation as we know it, and launches us into the time of no marked time.

Pentecost is the last era of marked time. It is the time between Jesus' ascension and the time He returns for His bride, the Church. It is the time of Word proclaimed and sacraments administered. It is the time of hearing, washing, bestowing, eating and drinking. It is the time promised by Jesus to the Apostles and the congregations. It is our time where there is nothing new but His mercies every morning. It is a time in which we as the Church Militant are similar to the Church Triumphant in the fact that we are all members of the Church Expectant. We expect Him to fulfill His promise, even as He fulfills it now.

Jesus was prophesied to come; He came. He spoke of His death and resurrection to the disciples and indeed He gave His life over as an atoning sacrifice, only to take it up again in victory over sin and death. He gives us today the heavenly gifts which sustain us now and forever by His grace. Divine Service feeds us these gifts without ever exhausting them. These are all good and salutary reasons to expect Him to keep His promise, to return and gather us by the strength and authority of His Office as the Son of the Living God. Then a newness shall be upon us of which nothing can match or be expected beyond it. A newness better than any resolution, decorated tree, or preparatory text. Then we shall see Him, face-to-face without fear. That is His promise. That is what Advent, Christmas, and New Year's are about, looking beyond today into eternity. God bless you all.