



The Church Door



by Rev. Andrew Lehman

News Letter

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As we begin another Advent season, we sing yet again the hymn "Savior of the Nations, Come." This is the appointed Hymn of the Day for the First Sunday of Advent. The hymn was written by Ambrose of Milan in the late 4th century and translated into German by Luther during the Reformation. It is a hymn passed down throughout the centuries of the Church sang as we begin the time of preparation for the coming of our Lord. The hymn rehearses the Incarnation of Christ as He comes down from the Father and is born of the Virgin Mary. It beautifully encompasses the story of the coming Christ and the significance of what it means that the Son of God was born of human flesh. It is a truly appropriate hymn to begin the season of Advent with.

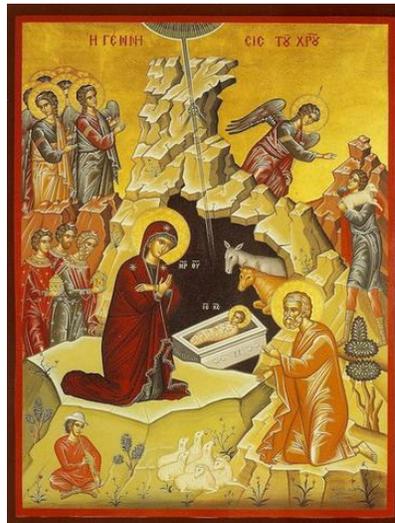
For the season of Advent is a season of preparation. We don't know exactly when the season began but it goes back at least as far as AD 480. Since the very beginning of the season it has been a time of penitential preparation. The two great festivals of the Church, Easter and Christmas, each were led into by its own time of preparation, Lent and Advent. As the early Church began to celebrate the birth of Christ, they began to spend the weeks leading up to Christmas as a time of contemplation and confession. They would reflect on the sinful nature of man and their own sins which they had committed as they looked to the coming of the Savior.

We continue this tradition to this day in our Church year. We drape the altar in purple as a sign of penitence. We exclude the Gloria in Excelsis. Advent is a time to hear again the story of the Incarnation. During this time, we set aside time to contemplate the coming of our Lord. It is why we have the practice of having midweek services during Advent. It is a chance to come and hear the Word of God read and preached that by it we might be prepared for that Christmas day.

But the world around us just doesn't seem to see this. More and more each year, the Christmas season begins earlier and earlier. The decorations have to go up a week earlier than they did last year. The Christmas music needs to be played sooner than it had been previously. More things need to be crammed into the already busy month of December. Some things even getting scheduled during the final days of November because there just wasn't enough time in December to get it done. It gets to the point where by the time Christmas actually gets here, most people in our society are sick of all the Christmas done and are ready to be done with it. For many, when the

Christmas season (the 12 days from Christmas to Epiphany) finally arrive, they are ready to pack everything away and move on to the next thing. They have already been Christmas-ed out for one year and are ready for the stress and events to be done.

And this is truly a shame. The Christmas season is a beautiful time a year when the Church gathers to celebrate and remember the birth of Christ. We praise and glorify God for the fulfilling of His promise in sending the Messiah promised long ago to Adam and Eve in the Garden. The entire time from Christmas to Epiphany should be a time of joy and happiness. But instead, for many, it is the time to cart all the Christmas stuff away and look to the next thing that needs to be done, falling into the drudge and dreary weeks of January and February.



The Church, in Her wisdom though, has not fallen into this trap. And we should not allow ourselves to either. Christmas is certainly a time to be joyous and happy, but first it is good to go through Advent. It is easy to find ourselves wanting to wish Christmas here earlier and earlier each year. We want to the time of carols and holiday cheer to be here as quickly as it can be. But it often backfires on us by the time Christmas actually comes. Especially because of all the stresses that come with the weeks leading up to Christmas.

This is why it is good to slow down in the weeks of Advent and come before our Lord to hear His Word read and preached to receive His gifts given to us as we begin this new year in the Church. It is good to reflect on the sinful condition of mankind and our sins which have been done in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Advent is a good thing for the Christian.

Merry Christmas! And certain so. But in its time and place. First it is good for the heart and soul to go through Advent. To see and hear the purpose of the coming of Christ and to look to the day when He will come again in glory and power. It is good for us to go through Advent. Have a blessed Advent and truly joyous Christmas.