Dear Siblings in Christ,

Happy New Year! No, I haven't gotten ahead of myself. The First Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of a new church year, inviting us once again to return to the heart of our Christian faith.

The word *Advent* comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming" or "arrival." While we often think of Advent as a season of preparation for Christmas, its meaning is much richer. Throughout these four weeks, we are invited to reflect on the coming of Christ in three ways: his coming in history, his coming into our lives today, and his coming again in glory.

Looking Back with Gratitude

At Christmas, we celebrate something extraordinary: God entered human history. In Jesus Christ, God took on our humanity, making his dwelling among us. The child born in Bethlehem is the fulfillment of God's promises spoken through generations of prophets and the culmination of a long story of God's faithfulness. The incarnation reminds us that God is not distant or indifferent to the human condition. In Christ, God has drawn near to us, entering into the joys, sorrows, struggles, and uncertainties of human life.

Looking Around with Attentiveness

Jesus is not simply someone who lived two thousand years ago. The crucified and risen Christ continues to come among us today. He comes to us through the proclaimed Word, the waters of Holy Baptism, the bread and wine of Holy Communion, and the lives of those around us.

Perhaps one of the most comforting truths of the Christmas story is that Christ was born in the humble surroundings of a stable. There was nothing particularly beautiful, orderly, or impressive about his birthplace. And yet, that is where God chose to come among us.

The same is true of our lives. We do not need to have everything figured out or put our lives in order before Christ comes to us. He meets us in our imperfections, our uncertainties, and even our brokenness. That is the beauty of God's grace. Advent invites us to slow down and become more attentive to the presence of the One who is already drawing near.

Looking Forward with Hope

Finally, Advent directs our attention toward the promise that Christ will come again. This is not a promise that should fill us with fear, but one that gives us hope. God has not

abandoned this world, nor is human history unfolding without purpose. All of creation is moving toward its fulfillment in Christ, when God will make all things new.

In a world marked by uncertainty, division, suffering, and loss, this promise shapes how we Christians live today. We can live with courage, practice generosity, pursue peace, and love our neighbors because we trust that God has the final word.

Amid the decorating, shopping, preparations, and celebrations that fill our December calendars, I encourage you to make room for Advent itself. Take time for daily prayer with the *Comfort and Joy* devotions (you can pick up a copy in the library), attend midweek Advent Evening Prayer (Wednesdays at 6:00pm) and weekend Holy Communion, reflect on the year you've experienced, and show acts of kindness to loved ones and neighbors. Allow yourself to experience the beauty of waiting with expectation.

Christ has come. Christ comes among us still. Christ will come again.

And so, with the Church throughout the ages, we pray: *Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

The Lord is with you, (Luke 1:28)
Pastor Will