

Dear Church,

An Advent story:

The winter of 1597-1598 was not kind to the residents of Unna, Germany. A deadly plague had taken over 1300 lives. Few families were spared. Surrounded by death and disease, you can bet that Christmas that year was anything but merry or bright.

Philip Nicolai was a Lutheran pastor serving in Unna at the time. He kept himself busy that winter tending to the sick and burying the dead, sometimes presiding at over 30 funerals a day! As a way to comfort his people, Nicolai wrote the hymn, "Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying" ([click here](#)). The hymn describes the actions of the city's night watchmen, who would cry out to wake the city when danger approached. But on this night, the cries were different:

*"Wake, awake, for night is flying! The watchmen on the heights are crying! Awake Jerusalem, arise! The bridegroom comes, awake! Your lamps with gladness take!"*

On this night, instead of danger, the watchmen cry out because they see Jesus approaching riding into the city in a royal chariot! They wake the city so that they don't miss Jesus' much needed arrival.

Christians around the world are now celebrating the season of Advent - the four weeks that lead up to Christmas. The word Advent literally means "coming." It recognizes that Jesus comes to us twice; first in the manger in Bethlehem, and again at the Second Coming to judge the living and the dead.

In Isaiah 64, the prophet reminds us that Advent is a time to *wake up!* It is a time for us to stand on guard at the gates of the city to watch for Jesus! Advent grants us time to prepare ourselves for the true meaning of Christmas; to clear our heads of all the cultural busyness of the season. It is a time of waiting, a time to watch for Christ and to wake the world to his coming arrival.

Peace be with you!

Pastor Christoph