

Chapters

A Journal of God's Reign at Calvary Baptist Church

Advent



CELEBRATING ADVENT AS A FAMILY

by Pastor Chad Vitarelli

ADVENT SEASON IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR US AS A CHURCH FAMILY TO PLACE OURSELVES INSIDE THE STORY.

Christmas is coming. We've been hearing about it already for some time. One of our administrative assistants has been counting down since December 26th of last year, so I am very familiar with how many days are left until Christmas Day! However, this year as a church family, Calvary Baptist will be involved in an "official countdown" to Christmas day, as we observe together the season of Advent.

The word Advent means "coming" or "arrival." The focus of the Advent season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ in his First Advent, and the anticipation of the return of Christ the King in his Second Advent. I believe as we walk through this season together, there is great potential to deepen our understanding and appreciation of our Savior, to heighten our hope and wonder of God's progressive revelation, and to increase our longing for the return of Christ in power and great glory. Observing this season will help us to be more focused on our primary identity as followers of Christ... to remember who we are.

Forgetting things is a way of life for most people. In fact, as I sit in my office writing this article, I remember now that I carefully made my lunch for today...and then left it on the counter at home, like I have so many times before. Throughout the course of a day, little things tend to get forgotten, chalked up to our juggling or multiple commitments, the pace of our lives, or old age.

I can forget things like my lunch without any significant adverse effect on anyone else....I will just be really hungry by dinnertime! However, if I

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forget my wedding anniversary, or one of my children's birthdays, there is potentially great negative impact on those relationships. It communicates that maybe that date isn't important to me, because I haven't assigned the right significance to that event or even the person involved. To forget one of those dates means that in some way, I have forgotten that person.

(Hayley and I just celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary on September 18th, by the way!)

Remembering Together
In fact, having a good memory is at the heart of our right worship. Moses warns the people of Israel, "when God brings you into the land that He swore to your

The Advent wreath represents the accumulation of light which is an expression of the growing anticipation of the birth of Jesus. Each week during Advent a candle is lit. The center candle is the Christ candle and is white. Three of the candles surrounding the Christ candle are purple. This color represents Christ's royalty. The other candle is pink and is a mixture of the white and purple. The pink candle is often lit on the third Sunday. The candles symbolize hope, peace, joy and love.

fathers.....with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant – and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." To forget in this way is not along the same lines as forgetting your car keys, or forgetting to pick up milk on the way home. God communicates our forgetfulness of His presence and faithful working as a precursor to idolatry. "You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you." How could God's people be so blessed, and forget to give praise and glory to the One who has bestowed the blessing?

To help the people remember these roots, the Lord instituted a number of feast days throughout the Israelites' calendar year. The Passover was an annual event to remind the people of their deliverance from the Egyptians through God's provision of the lamb's blood. The Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths, reminded the people of God's leading through the wilderness on the way to the promised land. And The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, was a time to give thanks to God who had granted the blessing of the harvest. These, along with other special observances, were reminders to the Israelites, throughout the year, that they were God's people. He had delivered them, continued to provide for them and lead them, and they belonged to Him. Throughout the year God wanted the children of Israel to remember, as a nation and as individual families, that first and foremost they were servants of the Creator God who had redeemed them.

The liturgical calendar utilized today by many finds its roots in these feasts of Israel, and functions much the same way for the Christian church. We are followers of Jesus Christ. No matter where we are, what we are doing, or whom we are with, we are still followers of Jesus Christ before we are anything or anyone else. Events like Easter and Christmas, along with the surrounding preparatory weeks of Lent and Advent, help us connect with

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our primary identity throughout the year. They help us remember who we are, and to Whom we belong.

Redeeming the Time Because the Days are Evil.

Our American culture and society need not determine how we mark time, let alone observe seasons or holiday. The commercial build up from retail stores and entertainment media begins in early October, leading up to a Christmas morning mess of colored paper and gluttony. For many, Christmas ends with a big let-down - for as fast as it came, it is gone.

The Advent season is observed in a very different spirit and with a very different focus. Rather than beginning with hype, it begins with quiet anticipation, a building expectation. In our church we talk a lot about the Story of God. The Advent season is an opportunity for us, as a church family, to place ourselves inside that Story. We observe the birth of Christ through the progression of Biblical revelation, we see what they saw. From the time God promised in Genesis 3 that a "seed of the woman" would one day "crush the serpent's head," to the promise given to Abram that he would be the father of many nations, to the prophet who would arise like Moses, to the root that would spring from the stump of Jesse.....the revelation grows, and with it the anticipation of God's people for deliverance, for the Messiah. During the Advent season, we reflect on this revelation and our anticipation grows as we see how God prepared His people for the coming of the Messiah.

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Christ's first coming and
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anticipating His return.*

This sense of anticipation is captured in the lighting of candles, an additional one each week, throughout the season. These candles are set in a wreath, and each successive Sunday as a congregation we light one additional candle. Three of the candles are purple, to signify Christ's royalty. The candle in the middle of the wreath is white, referred to as the Christ candle. One candle is pink, typically lit on the third Sunday, and is pink as a mixture of the purple and the white.

This is a congregational observance, but many have family Advent wreaths as well. Every night before or after dinner, our family lights a candle and reads through the Jesse Tree, a collection of readings for every day of the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day. Each reading is paired with a picture or symbol that corresponds to the Bible character or story. It is our prayer as parents that our children begin to see all of these "bible stories" in connection with the larger Story of God's plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. The excitement of the Christmas season really is that the Word of God was made flesh, and came to dwell among us! It hasn't meant that we disregard all of the "hoopla" of presents, decorations and Christmas cookies. It just puts all of that celebration in perspective.



In contrast to American culture, the celebration doesn't all end the moment the presents are open....for followers of Jesus Christ, we know there is much more to the Story. Even as we celebrate Christ's first coming and all that was accomplished through His life, death and resurrection, we are anticipating His return. He is Faithful and True, and Advent helps us to remember that we stand "between the Advents" of Christ, between His first and second coming. We are "looking forward to the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Reminding One Another

We could just observe this season as individual families. But God has placed us into the church, and one of our unique responsibilities and privileges as this body of Christ is to remind one another of who we are and to Whom we belong. "Sing to one another, speaking in hymns and spiritual songs, giving thanks...." (Ephesians 5). The Advent season becomes a vehicle to help us remember our primary identity together during the busy holiday season.

One of our family's "must-watch" December TV shows is the classic "A Charlie Brown Christmas." At one point we see an exasperated Charlie Brown, overwhelmed with the tasks of finding the right tree and directing the nativity play, crying out, "can't anyone tell me what Christmas is all about?" His buddy Linus is there to help. He takes center stage, and after calling for the spot light, tells the story: "there were in the same country shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night...." As day-to-day demands and pressures mount crowding our minds and hearts, we have all found ourselves at one time or another losing sight of life's primary, all-encompassing meaning...we all need a Linus in our lives! And God has given us to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, to spur each other on to love and good deeds, and to keep encouraging one another with the truth that unites us, along with our common hope of the coming King. I pray as we countdown to Christmas Day through the Advent season, we will be reminded that we belong to Him, and show to the world around us the true joy and hope that comes from Jesus Christ.



"THAT GLORIOUS FORM"

by Chris Brewer

Last year we engaged Advent by way of Peter Gordon's *Songs of Advent* and Julie Quinn's *Reckoning*, which taken together communicate that Jesus came and that He is coming again. This year we are featuring a recently acquired piece from our permanent collection: *That Glorious Form* by Chris Stoffel Overvoorde (pictured above). The piece takes its name from the second stanza of John Milton's *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, and portrays the unborn Christ surrounded by a crown of thorns. The image is striking, provocative, and a bit unsettling. It reminds us that Jesus was born

to die, an uncomfortable truth, especially in this vulnerable context. The juxtaposition of incarnation and passion gives the piece a place in art history alongside Bellini's *The Madonna of the Meadow*, Francia's *The Christ Child Asleep on the Cross*, Murillo's *The Christ Child Resting on the Cross*, and *The Adoration of the Kings* and *Christ on the Cross* attributed to Bonfigli. In contrast to those pieces, Overvoorde's *That Glorious Form* is a pre-birth narrative of Christ's life and death. As such it is fitting that we engage it now, during the season of Advent, as we anticipate the coming Christ from a post-cross perspective.

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Calvary Baptist Church
exists to represent the
reign of God as:
Community
Servant
Messenger

Advent Edition 2009

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁶And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

John 1:1-5, 14, 16-17

Advent

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
29 9:45 AM <i>Hope in Darkness</i> Pastor Jeff Halsted	30 <i>Creation</i> Genesis 1:1-2:3	1 <i>The First Sin</i> Genesis 2:4-3:24	2 <i>The Flood</i> Genesis 6:11-22, 7:17-8:12, 8:20-9:17	3 <i>The Promise</i> Genesis 12:1-7, 15:1-6	4 <i>Offering of Isaac</i> Genesis 22:1-19	5 <i>Assurance of the Promise</i> Genesis 27:41-28:22
6 9:45 AM <i>Shadows of Hope</i> Pastor Jeff Halsted	7 <i>God's Leadership</i> Exodus 2:1-4:20	8 <i>Passover and Exodus</i> Exodus 12:1-14:31	9 <i>Giving the Torah at Sinai</i> Exodus 19:1-20:20	10 <i>The Fall of Jericho</i> Joshua 1:1-11, 6:1-20	11 <i>Unlikely Heroes</i> Judges 2:6-23, 6:1-6, 6:11-8:28	12 <i>The Beginning of the Kingdom</i> 1 Samuel 3:1-21, 7:1-8:22, 9:15-10:9
13 9:45 AM <i>Flashes of Light</i> Pastor Jeff Halsted	14 <i>The Threat of False Gods</i> 1 Kings 17:1-16, 18:17-46	15 <i>Faithfulness and Deliverance</i> 2 Kings 18:1-19:19, 32-37	16 <i>The Call to Holiness</i> Isaiah 1:10-20, 6:1-13, 8:11-9:7	17 <i>The Exile</i> Jeremiah 1:4-10, 2:4-13, 7:1-15, 8:22-9:11	18 <i>Waiting</i> Habbakuk 1:1-2:1, 3:16-19	19 <i>Return and Rebuilding</i> Nehemiah 1:1-2:8, 6:15-16, 13:10-22
20 9:45 AM <i>Light has Dawned</i> Pastor Jeff Halsted	21 <i>The Hope for a Future and Joy</i> Luke 1:26-38, 39-56	22 <i>Anticipation and Trust</i> Luke 1:57-80, Matthew 1:19-25	23 <i>Worship</i> Matthew 2:1-12	24 7:00 pm Christmas Eve Service <i>Birth of the Messiah</i> Luke 2:1-20	25 <i>The Son of God</i> John 1:1-18	



LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

by Pastor Jeff Halsted

IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS, GOD PROMISES AND
FORESHADOWS THE LIGHT WHICH IS TO COME

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” This wondrous truth is followed with God’s first word of creation in Genesis 1. “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.”

Ever since we were created as God’s image bearers, we have recognized the significance of light as a life sustaining gift. We have also recognized God’s use of light and darkness to describe real distinctions in more than just the day and the night. This light...this darkness are both used to describe the state of reality in the world and with God’s dealing with His people.

As we think of advent, we think and reflect upon the longing of God’s people for the first coming of our Lord Jesus as incarnate God-man. We also think deeply and increase our yearning for His second coming where He fully reveals Himself as King of kings and Lord of lords and makes all things right and new. We wait for the fullness of light to be revealed so that darkness is consumed forever.

Think of the true biblical story of how God created humans and provided all they needed for full enjoyment of relationship and life with God, each other and the entire creation. Think of the grief of the Fall where, for the first time, we see our human father and mother flee the light and attempt to hide from God’s presence in the darkness of the trees. Yet as God called them from the

darkness, He provided hope for a light within the darkness. God dispensed punishment to the serpent and proclaimed, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” In the midst of the darkness of the Fall, God gives us the first glimpse of the True Light which will come to light the world. *And so we wait.*

*Yet as God called them
from the darkness,
he provided hope for a light
within the darkness.*

In the midst of our waiting for the Light to come, horrific events take place and God sees great wickedness from the lives of those He had created to be His image bearers...to the point where God would say that every intention of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil. And our Lord was sorry He had created humans. So He sent a flood to consume wicked humanity and to renew His created order. Think of it. He removed the light and sent darkness to cover the earth as the rains and floods joined together to destroy and renew God’s creation. In the midst of this darkness, God remembered Noah, a righteous man who honored God. God gave a glimpse of light that He would not utterly destroy His creation but would continue His story of the promise given in Genesis 3:15. He gives a promise that He will never again bring such destruction upon the entire earth through a symbol of light...a rainbow! *And so we wait.*

Still anticipating that promised Light, we see God call a man away from the darkness of idolatry and into the light of knowing the one true, living God. Abraham was told by God that through him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” More light in the darkness...the promise and fulfillment of Isaac being conceived and born...of God providing a lamb rather than allowing Isaac to be killed...God’s leading Isaac and Jacob in darkness. *And so we wait.*

Still yearning for that promised Light, we see God’s people going down to Egypt during a famine so they could live. God brought a man named Joseph through much darkness so he would be able to be a light for God’s people and provide for their needs and protect them during this time. However, as the years pass by, we see God’s people being made slaves in Egypt while experiencing some horrific actions against humanity. Perhaps the light had gone out for good...but we still take God at His word. *And so we wait.*

Enter a man named Moses whom God calls to confront Pharaoh and tell Pharaoh to let God’s people go. In the midst of darkness, God promises and foreshadows the Light which is to come. The ninth plague brought against Pharaoh’s hardened heart was darkness. The tenth plague was to be carried out within that darkness. At about midnight, the Lord said He would go out among Egypt and ensure that every firstborn in the land of Egypt would die. The light for God’s people in this? If they would kill a lamb at twilight and then take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of their houses, the angel of the Lord

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BUT JESUS PROMISED “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NOT WALK IN DARKNESS, BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE.” - JOHN 8

would pass by and not take the life of their firstborn. This serves as a sign of the Light to come, the Lamb of God, who would shed His blood and offer life and light to those who were living as dead people in darkness.

God then leads His people out of bondage and slavery. The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud during the day. But in the midst of the darkness at night, God led them in a pillar of fire “to give them light.” As we move forward in the story, we view a tabernacle and temple filled with light which function as shadows of the Light to come. We read of Israel’s darkened unfaithfulness and God’s continued promise of deliverance through the periods of judges and kings. We read of God’s people in exile waiting for and longing for the promised One, the Light of the world to come. *And so we wait.*

Flashes of Light

While in the darkness of exile, God provided the prophets to be His mouthpiece. These prophets spoke of the Light to come. The prophet Isaiah wrote “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there

will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.”

Again when describing his suffering servant who would one day come, the Almighty God says these words in Isaiah 42. “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD; that is My name; My glory I give to no other, nor My praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and the new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.” Again in Isaiah 49, “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

God had promised the True Light would come. Yet even then “justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we hope for light, and behold darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.” (Isaiah 59) The promise from Genesis 3 has extended through to this time of exile and even to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The True Light has been promised, but we have yet to see Him. And so we wait with yearning and expectant hearts and minds.

The Light has Come!

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end...The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy---the Son of God.” (Luke 1) Could this be the One True Light for whom we had long awaited?

God chose to reveal to shepherds that the Light had come in the midst of the darkness of night. “And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’...And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’” (Luke 2) The Light revealed in the midst of the darkness!

The Holy Spirit superintended John in writing about the Word (the Son of God) as being God who created and sustains all things. In this Son, this Word, this Jesus...“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...[now John the Baptist] came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him...the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1)

Simeon surely recognized that this Son was the promised Light. Upon taking Jesus into his arms with great joy at the temple, Simeon blesses God and says, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2)

But knowing this is the Promised Light, why is Jesus not simply embraced by everyone? How could it be that the True

Light would be hated? “This is the judgment; the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” (John 3)

But Jesus promised “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8) Jesus continued to teach us that he was the light of the world, and that this light would only be with us for a while longer before that light would be seemingly snuffed out. (John 12) Having waited so long for the promised Light, surely this would never come to pass.


Victorious Darkness?

A dark day indeed! Because humanity loved and cherished our intoxicating darkness rather than the pure, protective, and glorious light, we took Jesus by the darkness of night through a series of illegal trials where we spoke falsely against the true Light and attributed to him darkness. We did this even though we knew that “he was light, and in him there is no darkness at all.” We

hurled insults at the Light and embraced our darkness. We beat against the Light. We spat upon the Light. We whipped the Light. We crucified the Light. All of this resulting from our love affair with darkness. Yet there the one True Light hung upon the cross exposing our sinful darkness. And the judgment was made. Interesting that God brought darkness yet again over the earth as Jesus carried our sin upon himself. Interesting that the True Light was hanging in the middle of all of our darkness exposing our sin for what it is really is for all the world to take note at the significance of this moment. Suddenly, Jesus cries out “It is finished” and the Light goes out. *And so we wait.*

Friday passes. Saturday comes and goes. Still no Light. But then, the glorious Light of Sunday morning! “Don’t be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.” (Matt 28) The Light has broken through the last dark enemy of death. He is alive! He is alive! He is alive and victorious. The Light has conquered the darkness.

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WITH CONFIDENT HOPE, EAGER EXPECTATION, AND SURRENDERED LIVES, WE GIVE OURSELVES TO WAIT FOR THE FULLNESS OF LIGHT AND TRUTH TO BE REVEALED AT THE COMING OF OUR LORD.

Reflecting Light

Now the True Light calls us to embrace Him by faith and further calls us to surrender to the kingdom of Light while forsaking any allegiance to the kingdom of darkness. Jesus tells us that we, as His disciples, are the light of the world, and as the Father had sent Him into the world, so is He sending us. Those of us who are embracing Jesus as Lord and Savior are called “children of light, children of the day.” (1 Thessalonians 5) Peter tells us that we “are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2)

We must never forget our calling by the Light to be light. Paul reminds us that “at one time [we] were darkness, but now [we] are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).” (Ephesians 5) But even as we imitate God and reflect His being Light, we still expect and deep down know that there is something more for which we yearn. *And so we wait.*

Eternal Light

We live in the already...not yet. That is to say that the Light has come and truly won victory over darkness. Yet we still live in a broken, fallen, dark world. We live as victorious light while still being surrounded by, influenced by, and at times governed by darkness. And so as God’s people waited for the Light to come the first time to conquer the kingdom of darkness and make things right again, so we now wait for the coming of the fullness of Light. We yearn for Jesus’ second coming when He makes all things right and new. We wait with great expectancy for the coming of our Lord in victorious splendor as the King of kings and Lord of lords. We, with God’s people of old, long for the fulfillment of Isaiah’s words, “The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light, but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.” (Isaiah 60)

John saw this image fulfilled in his vision. “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city

has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day---and there will be no night there.” (Revelation 21)

The Light has truly come forevermore and has removed the very presence of sin and darkness itself. We yearn for the day when “the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21) AMEN! Even so come Lord Jesus!

With confident hope, eager expectation, and surrendered lives, we give ourselves to wait for the fullness of Light and Truth to be revealed at the coming of our Lord. This is the story of Advent. It is our story of waiting within the context of God’s story of redeeming and renewing all things. *And so we wait!*