The Advent:
A Season of Waiting, A Season of Hope
Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 1:18-25; Matthew 25:1-5

Intro: “It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas,” (slide; Title Slide)

For centuries, God has prepared a people for the coming of the Messiah, His Son, who would be their only hope for life and salvation. We also are a people of promise. At Christmas we celebrate the fulfillment of the promises God has made—that He would make a way for fallen man to be redeemed, reconciled and accepted in His presence once again.

In this "most wonderful time of the year" with its lights and glitter we can easily lose sight of the “big picture,” that is God's plan and purpose at work in His creation. The story of the incarnation and the birth of Christ is one full of power and wonder and to coin an overused term, it is truly “awesome” in the fullest sense and meaning of the word. But that is not the end of the story.

The English word “Advent” comes from the Latin word adventus, which means “coming” or “visit.” Webster defines Advent as: the coming or arrival of a notable person, event or thing; the period beginning four Sundays before Christmas and observed by some Christians as a season of prayer and fasting; the coming of Christ at the Incarnation; the second coming

The historic celebration of Advent (which most people today have no knowledge of) is in a sense, a re-enactment, a remembering, of the thousands of years of waiting as God’s people were longing for the coming of God’s salvation, the promised Messiah. A Messiah who would restore Israel to her former glory and vanquish her enemies. But even more so, a Messiah who would bring hope to the hopeless, freedom to the captive and reconciliation to the orphans; that is the message of Advent!

As followers of Christ in the celebration of Advent, we’re reminded of how much we ourselves are in need of a Savior. The focus of this season as we have all come to know it is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ, His First Advent. But there is more to celebrate and to anticipate for those who believe await the Second Advent, the promised return of Jesus Christ as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Acts 1:10–11 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

The Advent season has begun and we are just a few weeks away from our celebration of Christmas, but there is far more significance to this season called advent than merely marking a 2,000-year-old event in history. The Season of Advent is:

- The celebration of the redemptive plan of God,
- the revelation of God in Christ whereby all of creation might be reconciled to God.
- It is the process in which we now participate, and the consummation of which we anticipate.
- It is this double focus on past and future, looking back and looking ahead.

Advent also symbolizes:

- the spiritual journey of individuals as they affirm that Christ has come, that He is present in the world today, and that He will come again in power.
• That acknowledgment provides a basis for Kingdom ethics, for a holy lifestyle that arises from a profound sense that we live "between the times" and that we are called to be faithful stewards of what is entrusted to us as His people.

Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, of anticipation, and of preparation. There is a yearning for deliverance from the evils of this world; this was first expressed by Israeliite slaves in Egypt as they cried out from their bitter oppression. It is the cry of those who have experienced the tyranny of injustice in a world under the curse of sin, and yet who have hope of deliverance by a God who has heard their cries and sent His Son!

Advent is also a season of hope. It is that hope, however faint at times, that God, however distant He sometimes seems, brings to the world in anticipation of the King who will rule with truth and justice and righteousness over His people and in His creation. It is that hope that once anticipated the coming birth of a child, that now anticipates anew, the coming reign of the Anointed One, a Messiah, who will bring peace and justice and righteousness to the world.

An old Episcopal preacher said it this way, “the Advent is the coming of the Christ-child and the return of the reigning-Messiah”.

With this in mind, I want to read a section from a sermon entitled “The Coming of Jesus into our Midst,” by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer gives a very different insight or view into the theme of Advent that we may have never considered.

"When early Christianity spoke of the return of the Lord Jesus, they thought of a great day of judgment. Even though this thought may appear to us to be so unlike Christmas, it is original Christianity and to be taken extremely seriously. When we hear Jesus knocking, our conscience first of all pricks us: Are we rightly prepared? Is our heart capable of becoming God's dwelling place? Thus Advent becomes a time of self-examination. Put the desires of your heart in order, O human beings! It is very remarkable that we face the thought that God is coming, so calmly, whereas previously peoples trembled at the day of God and the world fell into trembling when Jesus Christ walked over the earth. We have become so accustomed to the idea of divine love and of God's coming at Christmas that we no longer feel the shiver of fear that God's coming should arouse in us. We are indifferent to the message, taking only the pleasant and agreeable out of it and forgetting the serious aspect, that the God of the universe draws near to the people of our little earth and lays claim to us. The coming of God is truly not only glad tidings, but first of all frightening news for everyone who has a conscience. Only when we have felt the terror of the matter, can we recognize the incomparable kindness. God comes into the very midst of evil and of death, and judges the evil in us and in the world. And by judging us, God cleanses and sanctifies us, comes to us with grace and love. God makes us happy as only children can be happy."

Bonhoeffer continues: “Could it be that we seek to thrust out the whole truth because it may cause our smiles to cease? Could it be that we cannot, or do not want to see that thunderous clash of the Light as He confronts the darkness? Should we not tremble even now as we ponder the event that occurred two thousand years ago?"

"Christ is breaking open his way to you. He wants to again soften your heart, which has become hard. In these weeks of Advent while we are waiting for Christmas, He calls to us that He is coming and that He will rescue us from the prison of our existence, from fear, guilt, and loneliness. Do you want to be redeemed? This is the one great question Advent puts before us.... But let us make no
mistake about it. Redemption is drawing near. Only the question is: Will we let it come to us as well or will we resist it? Will we let ourselves be pulled into this movement coming down from heaven to earth or will we refuse to have anything to do with it? Either with us or without us, Christmas will come. It is up to each individual to decide what it will be."

As we prepare and ready ourselves to celebrate Christmas remember, is not just about the coming of the Child, it is a preparation for the Bridegroom for the coming of the King. It is the climax of creation for it was in the "fullness of times," that God sent His Son into the world and it will be at the climax of the ages when He returns again as our triumphant King!

This day was been decreed before the beginning of time, a day that would make the forces of evil cower and shudder in fear. The day in which once and for all, darkness will give way to the light.

1 Peter 1:20–21 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

I began this message by reading the parable of the ten virgins and that is how I want to close today. If you remember the parable, all ten were virgins and all ten had lamps with oil. But the defining difference between them was five were wise and five were foolish. Five made preparation for the coming of the bridegroom and five did not.

The record of history assures us that the first advent, the birth of Jesus has come. Just as surely as was He born that holy night and laid in the manger, He is coming again.

Matthew 25:6–7 “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. “Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

As we busily prepare these last weeks before Christmas let us remember to prepare more than presents, parties and meals. May we all prepare our hearts before Him this Season. Christmas day will come, but just as surely as He came on that starry night in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ, our Messiah, the Kings of Kings will come again.

Christmas is a time to open our hearts to God and his all gifts. It is a time to celebrate the first advent and make our hearts ready for the second.

Will yours be open to Him? Perhaps today as we close by singing this Advent hymn it will take on new meaning for us…
Come, Thou long expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Even so, Come Lord Jesus, Come!