**Isaiah 64:1-9 November 29, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah chapter 64 here re-reading these words. “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him. You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

You think you know, but you have no idea. This was the popular tag line for a reality show on MTV back in the 90s, called “The Real World.” It also would be a good description of our attitudes when it comes to the season of Advent. It may all seem so familiar, even in the strange days that we are living through in the year 2020. First the wreath, the holly, the ivy, the lights, perhaps you’ve started making the same old traditional Christmas cookies. Thanksgiving ends, and away we go. Like driving on a road that hasn’t been plowed you stay in the tire tracks of the vehicles that came before you. Advent is simply a time of preparation for Christmas, so you go through the same motions that you do every year, the same things that your family may have done before you, putting up the same decorations, watching the same movies and television specials, doing the same things. You know what’s coming. You know what Christmas is all about. You know, You know, You know….the baby, the manger, the ox and the donkey, and the shepherds, and the angels, yeah…yeah…yeah….I know, I know, I know. Well, you think you know, but you really have no idea.

Advent is a season of preparation that comes at the very beginning of the Church Year. It begins with a Gospel reading that focuses on Christ the coming King as he triumphantly enters into Jerusalem on a Colt and is hailed and celebrated with the cry of the crowds, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” I bring up the crowds because what they are chanting and yelling and what they did shows that they are in the same boat as all of us. They think they knew, but they really had no idea. “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” What did David’s kingdom look like? It was vast and prosperous, you can think of the wealth and magnificence of Solomon, David’s son. David is known for his military prowess, how he dispatched and destroyed Israel’s enemies. They think they knew what Jesus was going to do, riding into Jerusalem as a conquering king, throwing out their Roman rulers, establishing a new and better earthly kingdom for God’s people that would last forever. They thought they knew, but they had no idea. Jesus rides in on a colt that had never had a rider before, teaching that Jesus wasn’t riding a warhorse that a conquering king would, he was riding a donkey that was wild and now was tame. He was coming to bring peace, but not through violence against others, but violence against himself, by dying in their place and destroying sin.

This is the greater picture of Advent. It’s not just “pre-Christmas” or the days where you bake the cookies and send the cards. “yeah yeah yeah…Mary…Joseph…the manger….the stable….yeah yeah, I know….” That’s a small, zoomed in picture, of just a moment in the life of Christ, Advent is the preparation for God being revealed to you and for you to be prepared for his coming. Hear the words from the final verse of the hymn “Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying”, “No eye, has seen the light, No ear, has heard the might of thy glory;” This is not an Advent hymn. This is not a Christmas hymn. This is an End Times hymn that we sang a few weeks ago as we were talking about Judgment Day at the end of the Church Year. But hear how it echoes the words of our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah chapter 64: “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.” You think you know God. You have no idea. No one does. No one living. No one here. No one out there in the world around you, no expert who writes a new book, records a new show, or speaks on the radio or some other form of media. They think they know what it will be like to be in the presence of God, they may even use this false sense of authority to mislead others, but they have no idea. No one does.

Some see the unknown in life as an adventure. They go off without knowing where they will stay, what they will eat, what they will do, or even necessarily how they will get there. The unknown to them is a thrill and drives them to constantly go out into the world to explore the unknown, it doesn’t make them nervous or scared or anxious, they enjoy discovering new things and not knowing what to expect. Is that our relationship to the season of Advent? Chances are the answer to that is no. Again Advent, which leads to Christmas, is a time of tradition, a time where we do the expected and the perfected. We make the same cookies, we listen to the same music, we watch the same movies, we put up the same decorations and they all have to be in their perfect spot. We may go out and replace some of the old decorations that have been broken, replace a few lightbulbs, take some new pictures for a Christmas card, but generally speaking we do what we know, what we like, what we are comfortable with. That’s what we do. It’s how we view this season of preparation, it’s not so much that we are preparing for Christ’s ultimate return in Judgment, it’s that we are just having a nice and comfortable “pre-Christmas” preparation of putting up the tree and basking in the glow of the manger. We are meditating upon a familiar, very well-known story.

But here we find Jesus riding in on a donkey to die a bloody and violent death for you. That doesn’t fit at all. Here we find these words from Isaiah, “Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” You think you know? About what? Cookies? Tinsel? Decking the halls? What about death? Death is the inevitable product of your sin. Do you know about that? What will happen? What will it be like to stand in the presence of the Almighty God? Your eyes have never seen it, your ears have never heard his might and power, you will have nothing to compare it to. And you are a sinner, all your “good deeds” are like polluted, filthy rags, there is no good enough. You think you know? You have no idea.

You don’t know. But there are those who do. Christmas is a time of great joy in families celebrating together in the same traditions of their parents and grandparents. It is also a time of great sadness as we remember those we have lost and who we won’t be celebrating Christmas with. Those who have left this world of sin and sadness and gone to be with God their Father forever….they know. Oh, do they know. They know what it’s like to be in the presence of the Almighty God. They know what it’s like to hear his glorious might. They know and are with their Creator, their Savior, their Comforter, their God. They aren’t worried about you making the cookies just right. They aren’t worried about you sending the cards to everyone on the list. They don’t care about your tree, or decorations, or that you didn’t use their old cookie serving tray. Because they know. They know what you can’t possibly know while you are in this world of sin and separation. They know God personally, face to face, and what are they doing? It’s right there in the same hymn, Wake Awake for Night is Flying, “Therefore will we, eternally, sing hymns of praise and joy to thee.”

Advent is a season of preparation. Yes, it comes before Christmas, but it’s preparing you for something much greater, much more serious, and something you have absolutely no knowledge of or comparison to in your life. It is a season of focusing on the coming of Jesus Christ. First he came as a child, born to a virgin who was betrothed to a carpenter in Nazareth. That’s the story you know. We will talk about that story, and how his birth points to his life and his death and his resurrection. But more than just a singular moment of joy, and the earthly traditions that come with it, Advent is a season of preparing for what you will be experiencing for all eternity, something that you have no knowledge of because you haven’t experienced it. Advent is about God coming down to you and making himself known to you, so that you will be in His presence for all eternity. You will be with Him, not by your own righteous deeds but because the Son of God became man and rode into Jerusalem on a beast that spoke of the peace he was going to bring. A man who rode into Jerusalem in humility to die for the misguided people of his time and our own. A man who rose again and gave you that perfection and eternal life as a free gift, greater than anything under the Christmas tree or that you can wrap in these days of preparation. You think you know him, everything about him, everything about the story….but you have no idea. You are in the right place. Look to the wreath, as the candles are lit, as the light grows, and soon Christmas will be upon us, but greater than that, soon the Lord will come to take us home.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.