

THOUGHTS

BY DOUGLAS W. SCHROEDER
SPEAKER ON THE WORD TODAY



D

ADVENT

The church season that precedes Christmas is Advent. I recall my father, Pastor Paul, enjoying surprising the congregation by greeting them on the first Sunday of Advent, "Happy New Year!" There were always surprised people who did not realize that Advent marks the beginning of a new church year. The first half of the church year focuses on the life of Christ and Begins with Advent, which like Lent is a period of repentance and reflection upon God's salvation. The readings from the Scriptures focus on Jesus' life and ministry, and that half of the church year ends with His ascension, which is celebrated on Ascension Sunday.

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The church's half of the year begins with Pentecost and has a rather lengthy period of Sundays after Pentecost. At the end of October Lutherans celebrate Reformation Day, the remembrance of Martin Luther, who was used by God to protest doctrinal abuses in the Roman denomination and eventually became the father of the Protestant Reformation. Also celebrated is All Saints Day (Christians should not celebrate what has become the pagan day Halloween, which is steeped in idolatry and worldliness). If you would like to learn more about the pagan roots of Halloween going back to the Druids, the priests of the Celtic religion, one good authority is John Ankerberg, who has a DVD on the topic. I presume you could do a search for his name and Halloween and find ample resources online. The last Sunday of the church year reminds us of the suddenness of Christ's return.

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As the Gospels are not just a biography of Jesus' life but aim to present the Good News of salvation, they skip quickly from the incarnation, visit of the Magi, and dedication of Jesus as a baby to his public ministry 30 years later! Advent services often refer to John the Baptist, the "voice crying in the wilderness," as Isaiah foresaw, calling for reform and repentance before the coming of the Lord (Matthew 3:1-12). The emphasis of Advent is upon repentance, which ties in with John's message. Purple or royal blue is the color for the season, and the third week is a reminder to be joyful, symbolized by the pink Advent wreath candle, as we anticipate the Savior's coming. It is a beautiful season for Christians, and when we participate in Advent services at church it primes our hearts to be bursting with love and thankfulness to God for sending His Son, Jesus!

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TRINITY PROXIMITY AFFECT

Recently, in association with Advent, I am preaching on Hebrews 12:14-29, which uses the analogy of two mountains, Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion, to symbolize God's Law and His grace; Mt. Sinai represents the Law, and Mt. Zion (Jerusalem) represents the grace of God. These two mountains evoke much theological thought, including what I refer to as the *Trinity proximity effect*. That sounds like something from a Sci-Fi movie, yet it is a phenomenon of the Bible regarding the unique ways that different persons of the Trinity have interacted

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with humanity over the centuries. God has found it necessary to draw near to humanity again following the rift in the close relationship suffered in Eden (Genesis 3). But it seems He has staged that process.

God the Father's relationship with humans is much like a parent to a small child. The Father's might and holiness are a sinners' undoing, much like radioactive substances can kill a man. The Lord keeps his distance in the Old Testament, getting close enough to impress upon people the need for reverence and worship, and to pummel God's enemies into submission. However, the closer He comes, the more threat to sinners, so at Mount Sinai, where the presence of the Lord shakes the mountain and his voice stuns the people, a buffer must be maintained. No one gets too close to God, except for Moses and others given special permission. The relationship is authoritarian, and the call is to obey. The history of the lineage of Abraham sets up the world for a closer relationship.

The template of God's nature and proximity is radically revised in the incarnation of Jesus. God's ways are revealed to supersede man's ways, as the Son of God takes on flesh. Now, God is tangible, touchable, and exudes mercy and gentleness. He models humility and grace. He is purposely vulnerable to wicked men, and according to plan even lets them murder him. His death procures our redemption from sin, and He rises from the dead not to abandon humans but draw them to Himself as God's Son glorified. The relationship has morphed into one of friendship, an adult level communion with Jesus' call to disciple (train, model) after Him. We are not merely commanded but called into that loving relationship with Jesus.

Ultimately, the goal of God's presence being infused again in human minds comes with the transition from Jesus to the era of the Holy Spirit, the last days of the Church He established. Just as incredible was the transition from the Father's infinite glory to the relatable Son, the final stage (this side of Heaven) is for God to dwell within us! The Holy Spirit is our Counselor, our Mediator, our companion in Christ's stead, who makes us the temple of the Holy Spirit. Our minds are remade in the image of Christ, and are set on things above, not on earthly things. We consider ourselves to be aliens and strangers here, because we think and are empowered so differently than the world. The Spirit gives us transformed minds and leads us into prayer and righteousness. God has come to us in nearly full measure.

I say "nearly full measure" because we are not quite back to normal in this life. The complete reset, when the Trinity will commune with us fully will happen after our death or the return of Christ. The book of Revelation returns to the garden as a description of our future home, complete with the River of Life and Tree of Life! Thus, the rift caused by sin has been cured, and the distance between has been breached by the Cross!

Blessings,
Douglas W. Schroeder