

# Seasonal Cycles of Life in Christ

1st Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2019

If we grow up in a liturgical church, we learn early on that the “Seasons” of the Liturgy are not "physical" seasons (like Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall), but "spiritual" seasons.

But what are "spiritual" seasons? That's quite hard for us to grasp when we're young. But our Sunday School teachers help us to understand that "spiritual" seasons are kind of like ***the different parts of a story***. So, when we read the story of Jesus' life, the different parts of his story are like the "*seasons*" of his life. So the “Seasons” of the Liturgy” are the seasons of the life of Jesus.

And young people "get" that, because they've already heard lots of stories, and they know how stories unfold. They understand there are different parts of a character's story, and if (for some reason) we want to call them “seasons,” they're ok with that.

But it's still hard for them to understand "The Seasons of Life" on a personal level, until they gain more life experience, and become able themselves to "look back" and "reflect" on the life they have already lived. Then it starts to make more sense that, not only Jesus had "seasons" in his life, so have they. They start to recognize their own life story – happier times, sadder times – where they've been / where they are now / and where they want to go from here.

It takes a long time past childhood. But over time, as we grow *in our faith....*, and the *practice* of our faith...., and the *understanding* of our faith.... we can come to see that the Seasons of the Liturgy (*Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter*, and the long, long "*Season After Pentecost*") are not ***just*** the seasons of Jesus' life, but – in a way -- the seasons of our own lives as well. The Spiritual Seasons of our life in Christ.

In real life, these spiritual seasons don't always follow the Church Calendar. (Wouldn't it be nice if they were that predictable?!) In real life, there are days when we pass through Advent, Christmas, and Lent all before breakfast!!! But, in church, we don't “cram them in;” we learn them all slowly, one at a time, over the course of each year. And we keep learning them – over & over again -- so that we can recognize them when they come up (faster & more frequently) in our everyday lives.

We start with Advent. The season where Divine Light moves into all of the dark & troubled areas of our lives, and invites transformation. Advent Light "moves in" to our lives in many mysterious ways:

***Divine Wisdom moves into the areas of our lives that are unwise*** (into the attitudes & understandings & points of view & beliefs that we hold, which are not helpful, but harmful.) Divine Wisdom "*enlightens*" us about things we'd often rather just remain "*blissfully ignorant*" of.

It may come to us through listening to the Word of God, wherever we may hear it. It may come through a caring encounter with someone (in the church or outside the church). It may come through a formal sacramental experience, like the Eucharist, or the Confession & Absolution, or through an informal, sacramental walk in the snow.

But however it comes, The Spirit of Wisdom moves into our hearts & minds and offers to transform the unwise parts of our lives. This is an Advent experience. An experience of Divine Light moving into the dark & troubled areas of our lives with an invitation to transformation.

*In the same way,*

**Divine Love moves into the areas of our lives that seem unloveable** (the areas that we honestly hate about ourselves, that we consider our "enemies", and want to be "rid of" once-and-for-all.) **Divine Love moves into the areas of our lives where we are loveless** (into our resentments; our prejudices; our blaming & longing to punish our "enemies".) Again, it may come through hearing a divine Word, through a Caring encounter, through a Sacramental experience. But however it comes, The Spirit of Love moves into our hearts & minds and offers to transform the *unloving* and seemingly *unloveable* parts of our lives. This is an Advent experience -- of Spiritual Light moving into our darkness, and inviting us to be transformed.

*In the same way,*

**Divine Hope moves into the areas of our lives that are in despair and seem hopeless** (areas within ourselves; within our relationships with others; within our "place" in the world-at-large with its many crises.) Through *Word*, through *Sacrament*, through *Pastorally Caring relationships* -- the Spirit of Hope moves in and invites us to be transformed in all of our dark despair. (*And, by now you can guess what I'm going to say next, because Anglicans keep repeating things over & over again*): This is an Advent experience – an experience of God's Light moving into our darkness and inviting us to awaken from our despair.

***So what can we expect in the Advent Season of our lives?***

We can expect to be moved. We can expect Divine Light -- Divine Wisdom, Divine Love, Divine Hope -- to "move in" on us – to "move in" to all the dark corners (the *unwise*, the *unloving*, the *hopeless* areas) in our lives with ***an invitation*** to be transformed.

***How & when & where will this Divine Light come to us?***

The "How" is easy. It comes most often through hearing a Divine Word; through a Caring personal encounter; through a Sacramental experience. (*But it doesn't only come in church on Sunday mornings.*) It often seems to come when & where we least expect it, and most need it. We can never predict the time or place. It comes like an unpredictable "thief in the night." But a good, helpful thief... who steals away our darkness. A thief we **want** to "break in", who "breaks in" gently when possible.

## ***So how can we prepare for its coming?***

Stay alert! Because you *really don't know* when it will come.... only God knows. But, *while you're waiting*, here are 3 helpful things that you can do to be ready for it:

**1<sup>st</sup>: Reflect** on the dark areas within your life – the areas where you become unwise, unloving, and fall into despair. **Reflect** on your need for Wisdom, for Love, for Hope.

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Remember** that the heart of what God will be sending you is *An Invitation* to "let in" the Spirit's Light – to "let in" its transforming rays of Wisdom, Love, and Hope – and to co-operate with their transforming power. It's *never* a mandate to do something on your own. It's *always* *An Invitation to Co- Operation*.

And **3<sup>rd</sup>: Decide**, in advance, **how you will respond** to the Spirit's Invitations when they come.

Don't let yourself get caught up in that downward spiral of "how you *'should'* respond, but don't really *'want'* to, because you're *'not good enough'*, or you're *'too lazy'*, or because it *'might be too hard'*, or you *'might fail'*", and so on. Don't do that to yourself.

Instead, just **decide what you're willing to do**, with God's help, when the Advent Light comes. Are you willing to **"let it in"** to the dark corners in your life? Are you willing to **"co-operate"** with its grace -- to consciously, actively **"participate"** in its transforming work – within your inner thoughts & feelings -- within your outer words & actions?

Believe me -- I know -- *this kind of "deciding-in-advance" can be scary*. It's always an *Act of Faith*, an *Act of Trust*, because *you won't really know until it comes* exactly what the Light of God's Spirit is going to reveal in you, exactly what kinds of transformation it will be inviting you to participate in. *You have to trust* (that it will be in your best interest -- that the benefits will outweigh the risks.) In truth – because we're speaking of the God who is Love -- it's more "exciting-scary" than "bad-scary."

Trusting in the God who is Love gives us the courage we need to push through our fears of the Unknown. Trusting gives us the courage to decide-in-advance how we will respond when the spiritual Light of Advent shines in on us.

So even if "outside" it's a bright Summer day....

Whenever we find ourselves in Advent's darkness, Advent's Light – God's Light – is **always, already** coming. We only have to wait and *"make space"* for it in our hearts & minds. So while we're waiting – let's **reflect**; let's **remember**; let's **decide-in-advance** how we will respond when God's Light shines in to us. Then, we'll always, already be prepared – ready to respond. Thanks be to God.

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