

December 2005  
**This Advent Season**

Dear Theophilus,

What else is there to say that has not already been said? What else is there to sing that has not already been sung? So it is, or so it seems, with Christmas.

But not with Advent. I don't know about you but I always find myself looking up the word in my Bible Dictionary, making sure I have the definition right. I am once again reminded that it is the beginning of the Christian year, a time to prepare for the coming of the Christ child, a prelude and prologue to Christmas.

The idea for Advent didn't take shape until the fifth century. What began as a time of spiritual preparation has transformed into a time of shopping and baking and cooking and letter writing which can leave even the most fit in a state of Christmas exhaustion! The many songs of Advent in our hymnal are often cast aside for the melodies of Christmas carols. It's considered a countdown and not a season in its own right. Clearly Advent is misunderstood.

My preparation for the Indians Fantasy Camp, oddly enough, has led me to Advent. Fantasy Camp, a gift from the congregation in celebrating my ten-year anniversary at LCPC, prompted me to join the YMCA so I might get into baseball shape. A participant last year gave me three words of advice: Stretch! Stretch! Stretch! Otherwise, the second morning I will be waiting in the long line that leads to the trainer. If I'm not in shape, the sprint down to first base will turn into a stagger. If my arm is not loose, I will not be able to lift it above my head the next day. Such is the nature of baseball.

Translate this into Advent language and we are told to stretch—stretch your mind and imagine a world that Christ is transforming through the Advent words of hope, peace, joy and love. Get in shape to have the stamina to live out those words in your own life (how hard it is to hold on to hope, for example, or work for peace, find some joy or love the people who cross your path each day). Loosen your arm and do some physical work that might benefit someone else, or lift people up with a phone call or card. Such is the nature of Advent.

I am reminded of the great theologian Karl Barth, when asked about the message of this season. He replied, "all is not lost, Christ has come. Rejoice, O Christendom!" May Advent, above all, prepare you for some rejoicing.

Blessings,

Harry