



## AN AME GUIDE TO PREACHING ADVENT

By: Reverend James Wesley Dennis III

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**Confession:** Christmas(tide) isn't my favorite season of the Christian Liturgical Calendar. Christmas is one of the most beautiful times of the year, but I prefer something else. Don't get me wrong. I love the carols. I love the poinsettias and the Christmas pageants. I especially love slowing down from the busyness of life to spend time with my friends at the holiday socials, beating my mom and auntie in spades at the annual family Christmas dinner, and feeling the joy and love that the season brings.

My favorite liturgical season is the season of Advent. This is because I love suspense, and Advent is the season of Christian suspense. Picture it: the whole world is in darkness. Evil sits upon the throne of Righteousness. Chaos and confusion are all about. Wars and rumors of wars are echoing through the land. Earthquakes and natural disasters are ravishing God's creation. Oppression and injustice are the order of the day. All seem lost and destroyed.

But suddenly, a speckle of light appears in the darkness, and the voice of the prophet Isaiah rings out above the clashing sounds of chaos: "*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*"

**What a relief! Help is on the way!** (*Isaiah continues...*) "*And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together...*"

Advent points us to what *shall* happen. It's not here yet, but it is on its way. Beloved, that's the textbook example of hope. And I love Advent because Advent helps me to see what **shall** be, despite what is. Advent is an invitation to live in the "*shall-ness*" of God:

*Every valley **shall be** exalted.  
Every mountain and hill **shall be** made low.  
The crooked **shall be** made straight.  
The rough places [**shall be**] plain.*

My Big Mama said it this way:

*The wicked **shall** cease from troubling.  
The weary **shall** be at rest.  
And all of the saints from the ages **shall** sit at [God's] feet and be blessed.*

**Advent is Christian hope at its best.** And although Advent isn't the fulfillment of the shall(s), it indicates that our prayers have reached heaven and that God has moved to do something about the world's condition. It has yet to happen! But there is a great deal of comfort in knowing that God is on God's way.

Maybe, this is the word that we need to hear this Advent season:

Post Covid-19  
Post Donald J. Trump  
Post... whatever it is that you're going through  
**God is on God's way.**

Take a journey with me as we explore preaching during the Advent season.

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**What is Advent?** | The word *Advent* derives from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming," and celebrates Christ's first coming while anticipating Christ's second coming. To prepare the Church universal for the coming(s) of Christ, the early Church set aside four Sundays on the Christian calendar for penitence and repentance in the hope that Christians would reflect upon the theological assertion that Christ has come and Christ shall come again. To stop only at Christ has come is to miss one-half of the significance of Advent. (Y'all, I love this.) During the Advent season, the Church makes it known to the world that the work of the Incarnated God is not finished. In other words, God is not through with us yet. And the next time God

comes to us, it will be more than a carpenter turned itinerant preacher preaching in the wilderness. Next time, a king will come to rule a new kingdom.

This makes Advent a political event. During Advent, we anticipate that God will come to restore justice and righteousness to creation. The first line of the third stanza of my favorite Advent hymn, "*Watch, Ye Saints*," puts it this way. "Kingdoms at their base are crumbling, Hark! His chariot wheels are rumbling...". Advent is an excellent time to make mention and bring hope to the current political atmosphere that we are enduring. (We'll talk more about that later.)

So, preacher, we are about to preach Advent. Are you ready? Yeah, I'm still getting ready too. Hopefully, these tips will inspire your creativity and appreciation for the Advent season.

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**1. Don't Rush** | There is a temptation to rush through Advent and get to Christmas. I hate hearing a Christmas Carol, reading a Christmas text, or hearing a Christmas sermon during Advent. It shows a lack of creativity and is a missed opportunity to invite your Church into a teaching series on the significance of Advent and its themes.

Take your time, preacher. Advent sets the stage for Christmas. Find Advent-themed hymns and teach them to your congregation. Use the Revised Common Lectionary to highlight Advent text. There's much to pull from in preparing to preach during Advent.

One of the most helpful resources I can offer you is this podcast about the 400 years between the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the opening of the Gospels. This podcast from the *Alter Guild* gives you a glimpse of the social conditions that made the announcement of baby Jesus significant. You can use this in a sermon series or Bible Study.

Here's the link: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/s01-episode-03-nations-rise-empires-fall-luke-2-1/id1326570363?i=1000398483117>

**2. Be Honest** | Advent allows us to face reality. This is a time to consider how our personal and social sins have contributed to the present condition of creation. This is why the liturgical color of Advent is purple. Like Lent, Advent is a season of fasting, repenting, and penitence.

Be honest about what's going on in the world. Be honest about what's going on in your Church. (Remember, only the Bishop can appoint.) Be honest about what's going on in the lives of your congregation and call your congregation into a season of prayer and repenting.

**3. Whatever You Do...Incorporate Families** | One of the secondary themes of Advent is the expansion of God's family. The Church believes that through Jesus Christ, humanity has been made joint-heirs to God's familial promise to Abraham. Said differently, God redeems us through Jesus so that we can be a part of God's family and receive all the inheritance promised to God's family members. Everyone is included: shepherds, three kings from the Orient, Gentiles, that cousin you don't like, EVERYBODY!

This is an excellent time to discuss what it means to be a family—God's family. It is also a good time to utilize families in your Church to perform some of the special liturgies for the Sundays of Advent. I especially love using families to offer Advent prayers and to light the Advent candles.

**4. Be Prophetic/Be Pastoral** | A few paragraphs ago, I said that *Advent is an excellent time to make mention and bring hope to the current political atmosphere that we are enduring*. This is because Advent is political. Advent forces us to decide which kingdom we will live in—the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of this world. Perhaps this is the time for you, as a prophet, to forecast where you see God in our current political affairs and offer hope for those challenged by the existing social conditions. Advent not only anticipates Christmas, but it also anticipates Luke chapter 4. Jesus comes to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. In other words, point your local congregation to **hope**.

**5. Be Theatrical** | Your local congregation needs to see its theology in action. This is where the pastor as an actor comes in handy. It may do you some good to show your congregation what hope, peace, joy, and love look like. This can be done in a production by your YPD or a liturgical dance before, during, or after the sermon. Be creative and make these themes come alive. We sometimes err in thinking that a sermon has to be a speech. It doesn't. And I guarantee your congregation would rather *see a sermon than hear one*.

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Finally, my job would only be complete if the professor in me came out. So here are some resources that can help you think about preaching during Advent:

Brown, Olu. *Hope: An Advent Journey*. Market Square Books, 2020.

Erickson, Scott. *Honest Advent Awakening to the Wonder of God-with-US Then, Here, and Now: 25 Readings for Advent and Christmas*. Zondervan, 2020.

Giglio, Louie. *Waiting Here for You: An Advent Journey of Hope*. Passion Pub, 2020.

Levine, Amy-Jill. *Light of the World: A Beginner's Guide to Advent*. Abingdon Press, 2019.

Wells, Samuel. *A Nazareth Manifesto*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

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