

**The Second Sunday in Advent**  
**December 3-4, 2011**  
**Mark 1:1-8**

*“Hopeful Waiting”*

Life is full of waiting, isn't it? We do an awful lot of waiting here in the nation's capital; in fact, we rank as one of the worst traffic cities in the entire nation. Experts tell us that on average we wait about 70 hours annually while stuck in traffic (<http://www.newsoxy.com/features/worst-traffic-cities-21966.html>). Most of us would consider that waiting to be wasted time. Truth be told, we don't like to wait and we're not very good at it. We are impatient people. One of my least favorite songs of this holiday season is “We Need a Little Christmas.” You know how it goes: “We need a little Christmas right this very minute...” Ugh... What I didn't know is that this song comes from the Broadway musical, *Mame*, and was first performed by Angela Lansbury in the 1966 production. In the musical, Mame has lost her fortune in the Wall Street Crash of 1929, and decides that she, her young nephew, Patrick, and her two household servants “need a little Christmas now” to cheer them up. The original lyrics include the line, “But, Auntie Mame, it's one week past Thanksgiving Day now!” Since the time the song was written the phenomenon of “Christmas creep” has led to the normal holiday season beginning much earlier than it once did. This has led to more recent recordings changing the line to, “But, Auntie Mame, it's one week *from* Thanksgiving Day now!” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We\\_Need\\_a\\_Little\\_Christmas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_Need_a_Little_Christmas)). We're not so good at waiting. But that is exactly what we're called to do in this season of Advent, and not just impatient, irritated waiting, but hopeful waiting. This is the theme for the message this day: “Hopeful Waiting.” May the Lord's rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus' sake.

In today's Gospel lesson, we encounter that mysterious man from the desert, John the Baptist, who bridges the age between the Old Testament time of waiting and the New Testament time of fulfillment. For more than 400 years, there had been no prophet in Israel, and then suddenly John emerges at the right time, the God-appointed time. His words, his very appearance, are like that of the prophets of old. His message is one of waiting: “**After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit**” (Mark 1:7-8). The people were eagerly expecting the promised Messiah, the Deliverer, to come and set them free, but John makes clear that he's not the One. Sigh... more waiting. But that waiting is not wasted time. John calls the people to get ready; to prepare themselves for the coming of the anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ, as the Scripture tells us: “**John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**” (Mark 1:4).

One of the principal themes of Advent is waiting, but not just the frustrating, waste-of-time kind of waiting that we usually think of. **Advent is hopeful waiting**, and this comes through clearly in the appointed Scripture lessons for today. In the Old Testament lesson (Isaiah 40:1-11), God speaks words of comfort and hope to his exiled people through the prophet, Isaiah, calling them to wait with patient hope until the coming of the Lord: “**Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him**” (Isaiah 40:10). “Hold on!” God is saying, “Hold on in hope until the day of my coming.” In the Epistle lesson (2 Peter 3:8-14), Peter reminds believers that this present world as we know it will pass away, describing this in powerful and graphic terms: “**But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up, and the earth and the works that are done**

**on it will be exposed”** (2 Peter 3:10). It’s easy to just sort of bump along in life from one day to the next, thinking that everything is going to continue forward like it’s always been. And perhaps in our heart of hearts we may even have our doubts about the Lord’s coming again. After all, we’ve waited so long. Here again, Peter reminds us: **“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9). The truth is, the Savior’s coming is delayed for our sake so that everyone may have opportunity to hear the good news about Jesus’ first Advent – his birth in Bethlehem, his perfect life of service, his innocent suffering and death for our sins upon the cross, his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, and his promise to come again to judge the world in righteousness. This is the very work we are engaged in right now: telling the world this good news about Jesus until Jesus comes again. It is because of Jesus’ first Advent and the gift of salvation we have in him that enables us to live with hopeful waiting for his second Advent.

Like the people of John the Baptist’s day, we also are called to repentance – turning from the old life of sin and turning to the new life that Jesus freely gives now, even as we wait for his coming again and the life of the world to come. Waiting is not always easy. Sometimes we’re good at it, and sometimes we’re not. The good news is that Jesus himself is among us here and now to strengthen us and build us up until He comes again. He comes to us in Word and Sacrament: in the Word that is read and studied, proclaimed and taught. He comes to us in the cleansing water of Holy Baptism and under forms of bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, giving us his very Body and Blood. He comes to us through words of encouragement and works of love in the fellowship of believers. As this year draws to a close and as we look toward the year ahead in 2012, we give thanks to the Lord for all of the good we have been permitted to do in his Name, and we seek his guidance upon our congregation as we share with our community and our world the love of Jesus. To be sure, we’ve got challenges in the year ahead, but with God’s help we’ve faced such challenges before and the Lord has graciously led us through them all. I strongly encourage your attendance and participation at Sunday’s voters meeting so that together we seek the Lord’s face in order to do the Lord’s will until the Lord comes again. As the great nineteenth-century missionary, Hudson Taylor, said: “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply.”

My friends, let our Advent waiting be hopeful waiting. Amen. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.