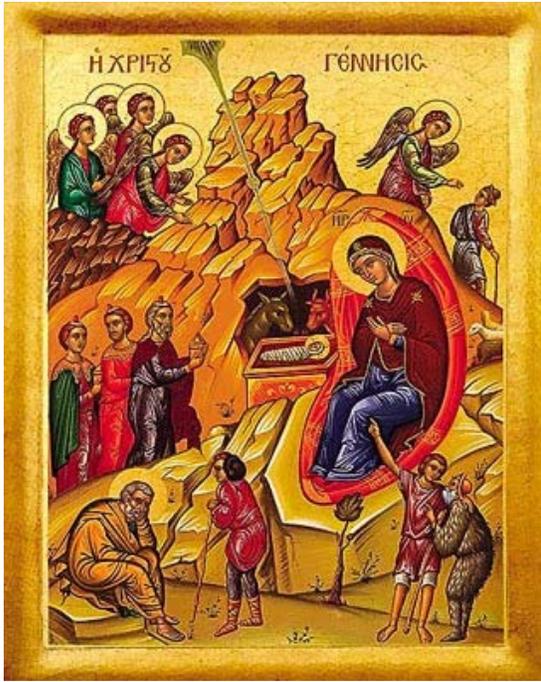


# Dear Brothers and Sisters



Malls, commercials, decorations, our mailbox and our inbox already point to Christmas.

But before getting ahead of ourselves, the Church invites us to a serious preparation for this Great Feast of the Nativity of Christ Our Lord. This preparation begins today, the First Sunday of Advent.

'Advent' means arrival or coming. St. Bernard tells us that there are three comings of the Lord. The third lies between the other two. It is invisible, while the other two are visible.

In the First Coming, Christ took our flesh, and was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. Unbeknownst, He dwelt among us; His divinity eclipsed by his humanity. He came in our poverty, our weakness. He was not recognized, not accepted. He himself testifies that those who saw him hated him.

The Second Coming will not be like that, for He will come in glory and majesty on the clouds, at the end of time. All will see him, every knee will bend. This second coming will be experienced by all, both the living and the

dead:

Advent has two parts, and we need both of them.

The first is a preparation not for Christmas, but for the Second Coming. All the readings of the liturgy point to the last things, inviting us to live sober and alert, full of expectation and hope at the coming of the Lord. Hope makes the future spill over into the present, and changes the way we live the 'now.' We already possess in hope the things we long for. 'Stay awake', 'keep watch', the Scriptures will tell us, urging us to live in expectancy and hope.

A practical thing to do during this first part of Advent is to wake up at night to pray.

1. Wake up in the middle of the night - set your alarm clock or ask your Guardian Angel - then sit down in silence for fifteen minutes and slowly repeat "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, have mercy on me a sinner."
2. Go back to bed.
3. You'll be surprised how refreshed you are in the morning.

The second part of Advent -the Novena, from December 17 to the 24- prepares us to celebrate the First Coming, Christmas. Not only as a memory of what happened two thousand years ago, but as an event that continues to occur for us now.

The third, the intermediate coming, which St. Bernard referred to, is a hidden one. Because it lies between the other two, it is like a road on which we travel from the First Coming to the Second. This road is travelled by us every day of our lives. As we travel the road between the First and the Second Coming, Christ comes again, invisibly. He can only be seen by the elect.

This third coming of Christ occurs in our everyday life, many times in the moments and places we would least likely expect it. Christ comes in our family, at work, at school, when we go to bed and when we rise, when we travel abroad and we are at home. May Advent help us to welcome the coming of the Lord in our lives.

Happy Advent!

Fr. Sean