

My Dear St. Francis of Assisi Family,

This Sunday marks the beginning of Advent, a new year in our Church's liturgical calendar. As we enter this joyful season of anticipation, we'll light the first of four Advent candles, starting our journey of preparation for the celebration of our Lord's birth. While Advent brings joy and excitement, it also carries a gentle reminder of spiritual preparation, symbolized by the purple color of our liturgical vestments – a color that, like during Lent, invites us to reflection and renewal.

Advent means "coming" – but what's special about this coming? Our Christian tradition beautifully recognizes Christ's presence in three ways: in history, in mystery, and in majesty.

In history, Christ came to us when "the Word became flesh" – when God became Emmanuel, meaning "God is with us." This miraculous arrival as a baby in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago is at the heart of our Christmas celebration.

In mystery, Christ continues to come to us in subtle yet profound ways. We encounter Him in the sacraments: when sins are forgiven, it is Christ who forgives; when a child is baptized, it is Christ who welcomes them. We also meet Him in our daily lives – in our neighbors, in those who are vulnerable, in the poor, and in all who need our care. Every act of kindness we show to others is an act of love toward Christ Himself.

In majesty, we look forward to Christ's future coming as Judge and Victor, when all creation will be gathered before Him (Matthew 25). On that day, His justice, wisdom, love, and mercy will embrace the whole world.

This first week of Advent particularly calls us to reflect on Christ's coming in majesty. That's why our Gospel reading speaks of watchfulness and preparation. Our celebration of Christ's historic birth becomes truly meaningful when we also prepare our hearts for His final coming.

As we set up our Nativity scenes and hang our Christmas lights, let's pray that their brightness guides us rather than distracts us. May we remain open to recognizing Christ's presence in the everyday moments of our lives and in every person we meet.

With Advent blessings and joy,
Fr. Vincent