



The First Sunday in Advent
The Collect.

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

¶ This Collect is to be repeated every day, after the other Collects in Advent, until Christmas Day.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. (Matt 4:16)

*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, **I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.** (John 8:12)*

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (Psalms 1:1)

What a joyous time of the church Year! In reality, Advent is much like a pre-Christmas celebration. But Advent, like Christmas, has a double, or even triple, application. *Adventum Domini* (the Latin term for this Season) was originally intended to commemorate the fullness of the Christmas incarnation of Christ, since Christ literally 'came at Christmas in the form of a man-child.' The Sundays before the Nativity were originally called simply the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, et al. Sunday before the Nativity of Christ. But where the double or triple meaning of Advent? Christ came from eternity past to save us. He came to Abraham in pre-Incarnate form, and to others of the Old Testament

Church, and He comes to us visibly in that Church of the New Testament. They were saved by faith in looking (with spiritual eyes) to the redemption which would be made available in Christ at His first Incarnation at Bethlehem. But that pre-Incarnate advent was not the only advent of Christ. Christmas was surely the most spectacular Advent of all up until now. But Christ made an advent into your heart at the moment of your election in God, and He will come with great power and judgment at His final Advent as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Advent and Christmas Season is very like that outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace received at Baptism and Holy Communion. It is a season of joy and warmth.

In the dim past of the Church Fathers, the Church year did not begin with Advent or Christmas, but with Easter. This date would be more consistent with the Old Testament New Year still observed by the Jews and even the Moslems. It is the time of Passover and freedom, and it is also the time of the Resurrection of Christ and the New Spiritual Creation of Salvation. In Iran, while we lived there, that day was called No Rooz (New Years). It is also the day of Noah's Ark landing on Ararat to begin the new physical creation.

But there is strong purpose also in beginning the Church Year with Advent, for without the Advent of Christ, there would have been no Easter. The birth of Christ is commemorated all over the world by their calendar date of 2012 Anno Domini (whether they wish to acknowledge that birth 2,000 years ago, or not). This COLLECT was composed by Cranmer in 1549.

It is such an inspiration for me to study the Scriptures and discover the unchanging love and Providence of God throughout His Word. He truly is the same yesterday, today and forever! You may look at the Scriptural references provided at the beginning of this devotion and believe the first two to say exactly the same thing, but they are different in a certain manner. Can you read those two verses from Isaiah and Matthew and discover the main difference in them? And what does the first verse, of the first Psalm, have to do with these two verses? If you read that first verse of Psalm 1, you will immediately discover the difference between Matthew 4:16 and John 8:12. The difference is one of **POSITION!** From the Fall of Adam, eastward in Eden, the heart of man has grown progressively Godless. There have been periods of revival and reform, but these are only punctuations along a path of downward declineuntil the birth of Christ!

The people of the Old Testament of Isaiah's time were walking a very dark path. They were headed for ruin. Isaiah warned them to no avail. They continued their ungodly walk until, like Lot in Sodom, they sat down and made their home in sin. *Blessed is the man that WALKETH not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor SITTETH in the seat of the scornful.* On their WALK toward sin(in Isaiah), the nation was taken away in bondage and stood with the sinners of Babylon, God sent them back to rebuild the fallen walls of Jerusalem and the Temple, yet they still sinned and finally, at the time of Christ, had made themselves at home in hypocrisy, sin, and deceit. They were **sitting** among the occupying power as at home with them. Christ came in the FULLNESS of time to redeem a world of profligate sinners. *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* (Gal 4:4-5) The Advent of Christ, in bodily form, came at the very moment of our greatest need for mercy- the very fullness of God's timing.

1st line of the Collect: *ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the*

works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light - A wonderful and meaningful petition for an unmerited righteousness that comes simply by the grace of God. What does this mean? It means that we cannot EARN salvation by righteousness for we are NOT righteous. The only righteousness we can lay claim to is that righteousness of Christ – and that righteousness is not innate but imputed. Light ALWAYS dispels darkness for darkness lacks any properties of force against light – it must flee from a single lit candle. Pray tell, how does darkness even approach that armor of light. Can the deep ark of winter penetrate the light of a single street light? Light is the very best armor against darkness and its Prince.

".....*now in the time of this mortal life.*" If we go not into that dark night of death without the light, we shall not find it in the grave. We must carry the light as a torch to uphold our souls in the resurrection. Like the five hapless virgins, of the ten, who had not oil for their lamps, we cannot purchase that oil in death. Now is the hour for salvation while life remains!

".....*in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility.*" Yes the Incarnation of Christ was humble and without fanfare, yet His birth was greeted by Choirs of Angels on the hills overlooking Bethlehem, and visitation of kings and wise men. He lay in a bed made of the same wood upon which He would later be crucified! He came to be unjustly judged of Rome at the instigation of His own people.

".....*that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever.*" At the Second Advent, Christ does not come as a little child in a humble manger. Instead of coming in a crude wooden manger, the fruit of the earth, He shall come in the grandeur of the skies, and that sky shall be filled with the hosts of Heaven. He comes as a Judge and a Rewarder of His people. Who are the quick and the dead? Quick, as used here, means the living! The dead are not necessarily only those who sleep in the dust, but sleep in their fleshly bodies and walk about as sinners. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)* (Eph 2:1,4-5) Did you earn that grace, or was it a gift of God? Don't be caught walking around 'dead' on that second Advent! Will you?