

During this season of Advent we will be examining the four themes of Advent: hope, peace, joy, and love. In this season of Advent, the signs of Christmas are already all around us: the Christmas displays are up in the stores, we've planned the Christmas parties with our families, our offices, and our apartments. It seems like it's been Christmas since Halloween.

There can be a lot of emotions this time of year: excitement over the coming celebrations, anxiety over these same celebrations, and fear that things won't go according to plan. However, despite all that's going on in the next thirty days, we have hope. **BECAUSE CHRIST PROMISES TO RETURN, WE WAIT FOR CHRISTMAS WITH HOPE.**

Despite this, I. Satan wishes to fill the month of December with anxiety and despair. Hope looks forward with anticipation. However, anxiety and despair looks forward and sees that nothing good could come of this. Satan wants you to be afraid. He wants you to try to avoid the good things that the Lord has prepared for your future, even if some of these things may be painful.

This holiday season, what good things might Satan be trying to spoil for you? This season is a time of gift-giving, and we can enjoy the wonderful show of generosity both in our families and among charitable organizations. Satan wants to take this blessing and turn it into a curse. "What if I don't get the right present?" "What if I don't give the right presents?" "How will I afford the right presents?" Satan wants to focus on what we don't get rather than what we *are* given.

The Lord gives the family as a wonderful blessing. We get time off to see family in this holiday season. But the devil slithers in with worries: "What if my flight gets canceled and I can't see family?" If you're homebound, you might worry that

you will be home alone while your kids are elsewhere in this season. Maybe you have a relative that you don't get along with, and you know you'll be getting into disagreements.

The Lord uses gatherings this time of year as a chance to reunite, celebrate, and experience joy, but the devil works to be a regular Grinch. He makes us stressed out about the details of party planning. He uses the good gifts of wine and drink to excess with all the unintended consequences that brings. December can be a stressful month, and Satan loves to turn our anticipation to fear.

But Paul shows us how we can have hope even in adverse circumstances. As we look at our epistle text, we see his hope.

II. Because of Jesus, Paul waited with hope. **“For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?”** Paul left Thessalonica abruptly about a month after planting a church. There were many worries that could have dissuaded Paul. With such a short teaching time, could false doctrine have crept into the congregation? When would Paul see them again to finish what was lacking in their faith?

However, Paul simply feels thanksgiving and joy for the saints at the church in Thessalonica. Paul knows that the Lord is bigger than just one man. Paul knows that the Church is bigger than just one eager missionary. Paul had hope because he knew that in Christ all things were complete, and that the Lord would take care of the saints in Thessalonica.

Hope means looking forward to something good. Paul knew that the Lord fulfilled the hopes of his people, the Jews. The Lord had promised that He would send a messiah to save

the people from their sin. He delivered on that promise, and that promise is what we reflect on in this season of Advent. The Lord delivered on that promise in the person of Jesus Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary on Christmas. There was a lot that could have gone wrong. There was a lot that someone could have worried about regarding the ministry of Jesus. Despite this, Jesus lived a perfect life to become that sacrifice for the sins of the world. He died on the cross to forgive us of all our worries, anxieties, and despair.

The resurrection of Christ shows us that there's even hope for us. Things this month could get a lot worse. We could even die. Yet even death is not anything to be afraid of as we have eternal life in Christ. It is this hope of the resurrection of the dead that drove Paul to go to the extreme lengths that he went, through good times and hardship, through joys and calamities.

“Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”

Presents, family, and parties, Jesus has this next month in His grip because You are in His grip. You can wait with hope this month because Jesus is coming again, even as He comes to you this day through Word and Sacrament ministry. He is the one directing your way in the days to come.

III. We wait with hope because Christ promises to return.
All throughout the month of December, you may not know what exactly will happen, and you may be anxious for things to happen, but you can wait with hope because you know how the story started with Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. You

also know how it will end. You know the story ends with Jesus coming again just as He ascended to heaven, and He will make all things right.

It may very well be that you don't get the present you wanted for Christmas. You may disappoint friends by not purchasing the right gift. You may spend too much and max out the credit card, but Christ has it under control. He is directing His way to you through Word and Sacrament, and He is going to come again to make all things right. You wait with hope for Christmas because Christ is all the present we ever need.

Your flight may be canceled and you're stuck in the airport on Christmas. Your family may forget you. You may have a major falling out with an uncle. You are never alone. You wait with hope for the holiday because even if you are alone and isolated throughout the month of December, you never go alone because Jesus is with you, and one day, you will see Him face to face.

The party may take hours to prepare. Someone might get you sick at the gathering. Your sister might make a fool of herself getting drunk at the reunion. No matter what happens, you wait with hope because Christmas is coming whether you like it or not. Jesus is coming back and He will bring about the party of parties: the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.

You will make it through yet another holiday season. It is by the strength of the Father delivered by the Holy Spirit. You wait with hope for the many blessings He will shower upon you in the month ahead, even more so, you wait with hope for the revelation of God's holiness in you when Jesus Christ comes in glory with all His saints.