

Advent Shapes Our Worldview

INTRODUCTION FOR THE ADVENT SEASON



Traditionally the Gospel reading the Sunday after Thanksgiving is Matthew 25: 31-46.

The passage opens with words that should make our hearts soar, or, perhaps, shiver with dread: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

As the passage makes clear, Christ's second coming will be very different from his first. He will return in glory, not obscurity. He will return as the King of the Universe, not as a nobody in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire. And this time, He will do the judging.

Now if you're wondering, "Wait, isn't that time after Thanksgiving the start of the Christmas season?" In most homes it's when we can unashamedly listen to Christmas music. Well, the answer is, "no," it isn't the Christmas season. It's *Advent*.

The first Sunday after Thanksgiving through Christmas Eve, is the season of Advent, according to the Church calendar. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus* meaning "come to." Advent is the season when Christians anticipate the celebration of God's coming to live and die as one of us.

And the word "coming" refers both to His Incarnation and "His return as the 'Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory," who will "send his angels to gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends

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of the earth to the ends of the heavens' (Mark 13:26-27)."

This anticipation of Christ's coming, marking The Incarnation and fulfillment of prophecy, isn't just something to look at historically, but it is an event that shapes culture and our worldview.

When most Christians think about worldview (if they think about it at all), they think about it in terms of ideas. Now worldview isn't less than ideas, but it is more.

Bill Brown, Gary Phillips and I define worldview as the framework of basic beliefs we have that give us a view of and for the world. That framework includes ideas, but also our imagination, our habits, and the basic stories—both cultural and personal—that shape our lives.

We live out of these stories—they give us, as N. T. Wright puts it, "a way-of-being-in-the-world."

Twelve years ago, the historian Robert Louis Wilken wrote in the journal *First Things* that "The Church is a culture in its own right. Christ does not simply infiltrate a culture; Christ creates culture by forming another city, another sovereignty with its own social and political life."

What distinguishes this culture from the non-Christian world is not some kind of physical separation, or even a spiritual withdrawal, but, to borrow Wright's phrase, a "way-of-being-in-the-world" that's different.

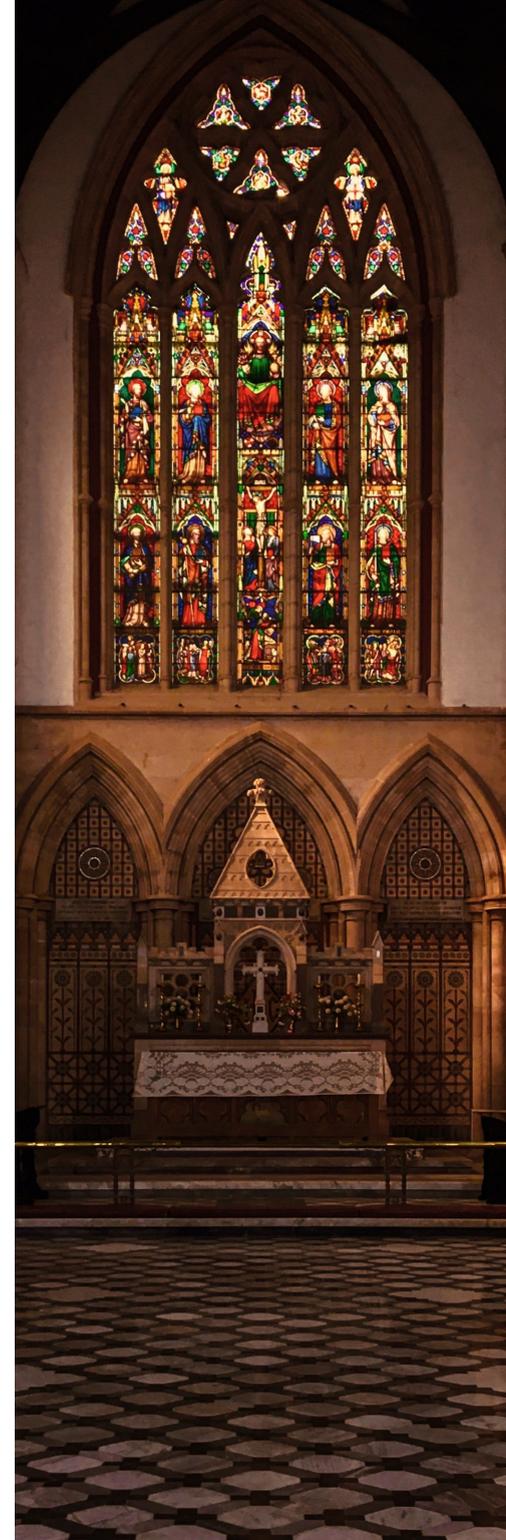
According to Wilken, three hallmarks of this "way" were the distinctive Christian uses of space,

time, and language. As Wilken writes, "We should not underestimate the cultural significance of the calendar and its indispensability for a mature spiritual life. Religious rituals carry a resonance of human feeling accumulated over the centuries."

He continues "The season of Advent . . . is a predictable reminder that the Church lives by another time, marked in the home by a simple ritual, the lighting of a violet Advent candle set in an evergreen wreath on a dark evening in early December."

"Sacred seasons" like Advent, "run at right angles to the conventional calendar [and] they offer a regular and fixed cessation of activity." They become "times of reflection and contemplation that open us to mystery and transcendence."

What's more, they provide the "gift of leisure," a much-needed respite from "the world of work and money and minding our p's and q's."





Only if we truly understand those cultural forces that shape our worldview can we intentionally open ourselves to the possibility that there is a way of being in the world that is both countercultural and transformative.

As a guide through this season of Advent our writing team is creating reflections on the themes in Advent. To have a copy of these reflections, a beautifully illustrated ebook, and to receive our weekly commentaries through this season, visit BreakPoint.org/advent and we'll send you readings that will guide us through Advent together.