With the exception of unseasonably warm weather, the outward signs of Christmas are beginning to appear. Christmas ads have been out for some time now and maybe you are starting to buy gifts. Christmas trees are up - or will be shortly - in many houses. Holiday parties and gatherings are being planned. In many households more baking will be done in the next two weeks than the fifty before.

And along with all this, if we have not heard it mentioned yet, we will soon. Before long we will be hearing about - and encouraged to get into - the Christmas spirit. But what exactly does that mean? Generally speaking, the Christmas spirit has to do with giving and cheerfulness and the desire for peace on earth and good will toward men. And there is nothing wrong with that at all.

However, we are gathered here today because it is Advent. Whereas Christmas is a grand and glorious event, Advent is the period of time when we prepare ourselves to celebrate and embrace the event - not only the first coming of Christ, but the second coming as well.

Consequently, Advent has its own spirit and mood to it. And that is what we will explore this morning. In reading, Paul speaks about: THE SPIRIT OF ADVENT. It consists of readiness, preparedness and alertness.

Paul begins: And do this, understanding the present time. The time has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. In the verses just before the opening words, Do this, Paul issued a call for the Roman Christians and us to be loving. So do this means be loving or out of love for Christ, show your Christian faith in how you are and what you do.

And we are to do this understanding the present time. We are presently living in a time when our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. This was true then; it is just as true now. In the present time the night is nearly over - meaning the dark night of sin and unbelief and trouble (which often seems to have the upper hand in the world) will soon be over, because, as Paul writes, the day is almost here. The dawn of Christ's second Advent is right around the corner.

So understanding the present time means realizing that Christ could come at any moment. Understanding the present time means not dismissing the coming of Christ as something in the distant future, but viewing it as an ever present reality - as well as a living hope we cling to each and every day.

With this in mind, believers are to adopt a spirit of readiness and preparedness to meet the Lord. Practically speaking, how do we do this? Paul says: Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does this mean? In one sense, this is something we cannot do. It is something that God the Holy Spirit did for us by bringing us to faith. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul equates being clothed with Christ with our baptism - at which time the Holy Spirit either brought us to faith or confirmed us in our faith in Jesus as our Savior. In the glimpse of
Paradise he was given in the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John speaks of the inhabitants of heaven wearing white robes that have been washed clean by the shed blood of God's sacrificial Lamb, his Son, Jesus Christ.

This clothing, which God in his grace has decked us out, is indeed the proper style to be wearing when our Lord returns at his second Advent. The words of the hymnist come to mind: **Jesus thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress.** When Christ comes again, there will be a dress code. **Clothed with Christ** means we will meet him with joy at the celebration of his first coming and confidence at his second. Clothed with anything else will get us nowhere, no matter how upright we may think we are.

I remember quite a few years ago, I had the opportunity to talk about spiritual things with a Viet Nam vet. This particular individual was in a special unit because he was an excellent marksman. He was highly confident of his abilities and this confidence transferred over into every other area of his life. When I talked to him about Jesus and the need for a Savior from our sin, he said that he had always stood on his own two feet and faced things like a man, and if the day came when he appeared before the judgment throne of God, he would do the same thing there - stand on his own two feet - and take his chances.

I also recall another occasion talking with a woman who had grown up in a church that does not deny Jesus, but places the emphasis for salvation on one's own actions. She listened politely to what I had to say about eternal life through faith in Jesus as Savior and placing our entire trust for heaven on him alone. She then proceeded to say that the way in which she had been raised and the way she still believed was that she had live a good life and after that she would be rewarded by God for doing so.

I only had one conversation with these two people; after that I never saw them again. I hope their ideas have changed, because that kind of thinking is sadly mistaken. That kind of thinking puts God in debt to man. That kind of thinking sees no need for a Sav. And most sad of all, that kind of thinking will result in being clothed in spiritually worthless rags at the time of Jesus' second Advent.

On the occasion of Christ's return to us - or our return to him at the hour of our death - the proper apparel is to be **clothed with Christ.** And part of our Advent joy is knowing that we are dressed for the season.

However, to be **clothed with Christ** in the context of our text is a call for Christian sanctification – the way we live as Christians. Paul uses the active tense and gives us this specific encouragement: **Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.** He also tells us to **put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.**

In other words, Paul issues a call for believers to live the Christ-like life; to believe and devote ourselves to Jesus as we await his coming. Let’s note well how and to whom the introductory words of our text are addressed: **The time has come for you to wake up from your slumber.** Paul is addressing Christians here. Which means he is addressing us.

With this talk of waking up and slumber Paul is recognizing a tendency which befalls all Christians - the tendency toward spiritual sluggishness or complacency or smugness. The tendency we as Christians too often have to hear, but not to act; to talk, but not to do. The tendency we as Christians too often have in equating the coming Day of Judgment or the day of our death (personal Judgment Day) with something way off in the future - and
something which really has little or no bearing on how I live or act now. The tendency to
not live our lives on high alert.

To this, Paul says: **Wake up! Rejoice in your faith and rejoice by practicing your
faith, because the time to do so in this fallen world may not be very long.**

Paul says: **We must clothe ourselves with Christ and put on the armor of light
in these last days so that in some small way the beacon of Christ's love will shine forth in
us and through us. Paul says we must also clothe ourselves with Christ so we can
withstand the temptations that will routinely beset us until Christ's return.**

Our text continues with further thoughts and admonitions on the spirit of Advent: **So
let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave
decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality
and debauchery, not in dissention and jealousy.**

Here Paul reminds us that we live in a fallen world and the allusion to putting on
armor suggests it is one that we must do battle with. The list Paul enumerates was
common in Roman times - and since mankind's sinful nature does not change or evolve
over time, just as common in ours.

When these clashes with worldly temptations come, Paul encourages us to **behave
decently** and remember that we are clothed with Christ. Practically speaking, how do we
handle the temptations of the world which come our way? Scripture would tell us first, if at
all possible, to avoid temptation. But if unavoidable, confront them and analyze them with
the Word. Some will say that the whole WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) movement is an
exercise in social gospel, but the question itself can be put to good use as we critically
examine the temptations the world dishes up for us.

So Paul's overall admonition to us here  to remember who we are (God's people)
and with what we are (clothed with Christ) and when we are (living in the shadow of
Christ's coming) and live accordingly.

And that pretty well sums up the spirit of Advent. As we get ready to meet our Savior
once again, both as the Babe of Bethlehem and as the Returning King of Kings and Lord
of Lords, may God keep us strong and steadfast; always prepared and always alert.
Because one way or another, this we know for sure: our Savior is coming soon. Amen.

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