

SCREEN: Happy New Year!

Happy New Year everybody!

And no, I'm not having a senior moment...though I do have those!

Today we begin a brand new Church year.

Our calendar is different from society's.

Our's starts today as we get ready for the birth of Jesus.

We're a little late though; our culture began preparing for Christmas weeks ago.

I saw a house with Christmas lights on before the election!

Christmas tree lots have been stocked for a few weeks,

and stores have been playing Christmas songs since October.

And I've noticed that people react to this in one of two ways: anger or joy.

The angry reaction is, "*why are they starting so early?*"

And the joyful reaction is, "*Yay, Christmas is coming!*"

SCREEN: blank red background

I don't know about you, but I really need Christmas and so does our world.

Because, let's be honest, a quick glance of the headlines on any day challenges even the most eternal optimist.

Climate change, natural disasters, immigration battles, war, violence, intolerance, the abuse crisis in the Church...all big downers.

SCREEN: Who Needs Christmas main screen

But fear not!

Today we began our Advent message series titled, *Who Needs Christmas*

And just in the way I say that phrase you can hear the two attitudes I spoke of.

It can be said like Scrooge in a 'bah, humbug' sort of way: "*Who needs Christmas!*"

Meaning, you'd just as soon not have Christmas OR

it can be said like a host or hostess bringing out dessert,

"*Who needs Christmas?*"

In a way that makes everyone smile and want to dig in.

So how do God and the Church want us to approach Advent???

Not with a bah humbug, "*Who needs Christmas!*"

But with happiness and joy, "*Who needs Christmas?*"

Let's turn to the Advent readings we heard.

If you think times are tough now,

try living in the time of Jeremiah the prophet.

He was God's spokesman at a time when the Jewish nation was facing destruction.

They were on the verge of losing everything...and I really mean everything.
Their country was about to be invaded, the city of Jerusalem destroyed,
their Temple torn down, many people were going to be taken
as captives to Babylon and be held there for 50 years.

They couldn't imagine anything worse.

God had promised to always be with them, to save them,
how could this happen?

How could they remain joyful and hopeful?

Well in our first reading today,

God told Jeremiah to say this:

**SCREEN: The days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will fulfill the promise
I made to the house of Israel and Judah.**

In those days, in that time,

I will raise up for David a just shoot ;

he shall do what is right and just in the land.

In those days Judah shall be safe

and Jerusalem shall dwell secure;

this is what they shall call her:

“The LORD our justice.”

A promise of salvation, a reason to hope, a cause for joy...

God is coming to save us!

Did the people believe Jeremiah's promise?

Most did not.

Jeremiah was mocked, ridiculed and rejected...many called for his death.

But Jeremiah's prophecy came true.

God did save them.

They were freed from captivity in Babylon,

returned home and rebuilt their country and their temple.

Promise made, promise kept.

But what about that 'just shoot from David'?

The Jewish people were waiting for the messiah to come and make everything right.

Jeremiah's promise was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus,

the very birth we're preparing to celebrate.

Jesus also offered promises of salvation and hope and joy.

But his message today began with some dire warnings.

Jesus said, "*There will be signs in the sun, the moon,*

*and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay,
perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves.*

People will die of fright

*in anticipation of what is coming upon the world,
for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

SCREEN: And then they will see the Son of Man
coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

**But when these signs begin to happen,
stand erect and raise your heads
because your redemption is at hand.**

It's a promise to save us and all humanity.

Jesus is the light in the darkness; he is hope for all who despair and
joy to those who are lost and hurting.

It's what we celebrate in Advent and it's why we need Christmas.

SCREEN: Advent wreath

The challenge facing you these next 4 weeks is really daunting.

You and I have to navigate the stress, the tension and the craziness of the holidays
and at the same time, spiritually prepare ourselves for Jesus' coming.

To do that, you'll have to live each day of Advent with
one foot in the culture and another in the Church.

It's a struggle, but you can do it.

There are some great opportunities available to you.

But to take advantage of them, you'll have to start by admitting
the world needs Christmas and you need Christmas.

So I want to talk of two ways to be renewed in Advent.

SCREEN: give yourself the gift of hope

Here's the first way: give yourself the gift of hope.

That might sound like an impossible task, but trust me, it's easier than you think.

Here are a few easy suggestions.

After Mass, stop by the religious goods stand in our new Phase 1 space
and get a Little Blue book. It's just \$1.

It has a page for each day of Advent with a scripture reading and a prayer.

Keep it in your purse or backpack, at your desk or bedside and
spend just 5 minutes a day reflecting on God's promises.

Here's another way:

women are invited to the Women's Advent Dinner next Sunday evening.

It's a fantastic event, tickets are available right after Mass in the entranceway.

And one last opportunity I'll mention is our new Friday Night Praise, which is this Friday starting at 7pm.

It's 90 minutes of music, prayer, scripture, adoration and quiet time.

If you can't stay the whole time, come for as long as you can.

It's a phenomenal opportunity guaranteed to fill you with hope.

These are ways for you to be renewed this Advent.

If you do even one of the things I mentioned you'll be giving yourself a great gift.

SCREEN: give someone else the gift of hope

And the second way to be renewed in Advent is

to give someone else the gift of hope.

And here's a few ways you can do this.

You could start with your family and friends.

Be kinder this month, help out without having to be asked,

try not to get stressed over small stuff...smile more, give a compliment.

Beyond your immediate circle, give the gift of hope to someone who is really struggling.

In the entranceway you'll see our beautiful Giving Tree display.

To participate, take one of the green flyers and a star or pink envelope.

The Giving Tree helps pregnant women in crisis at The Gabriel Network

as well as the hungry in Bowie and some of the poorest individuals in Washington DC

who are served at Assumption Catholic Church.

The ways I mentioned don't require a lot of your time or money.

They're all practical, simple things requiring a decision and commitment on your part.

Decide to do one or two things this Advent and you'll come to Christmas

more hopeful, peaceful and joyful.

I'd like to end by showing you a 2 minute video that lets you know

what these weeks are about and reminds us who needs Christmas.

SCREEN: Advent video