Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, amen.

Happy New Year in the Church tradition and cycles. We gather in Word and Spirit today in the season of Advent; a time of preparation and the expectation of a new beginning. As true to human nature, we believe there is something we must do to prepare for the Lord and the coming days. However; the preparation lies solely with God to prepare His people for the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom that be brings to His people on earth.

God is righteous and will fulfill His Words and promises in the fullness of time, aligning with the Law that has been handed down, and in perfect timing with the seasons and cycles that are established. For example, Isaiah prophecies that a shoot from the stump of Jesse, who will destroy all evil and bring peace. As the Lord God speaks these words through His servant, the Holy Spirit is active in bringing this prophecy to fulfillment. We see the lineage of Christ perfectly aligned within fourteen generations from Abraham to Jesse through David and Joseph to Christ. And until Christ is born, there is no way to define or forecast the date and time of our Lord’s birth.

In other words, God will prepare the minds of all of us to see and understand His Word and the prophecies unfolding. We will only see in hindsight the wisdom and mystery of God made known to humankind. And still, when the truth is revealed, we are amazed at how it all fits together: perfectly. The same is true with our lives here and now. We do not see the reason for many of the events and circumstances that we endure; we do not see the value in some of the things we do. However, as the years go by, we understand and see that God was guiding us in words and actions to establish the future. God guided us to this moment in our life and the people that surround us. This is not coincidence; this is divine purpose.

The Holy Spirit guided our footsteps to be at a place and time to meet someone so the future would provide the history we have in our lives today. This is no coincidence my friends, this is a mystery of God and his loving grace that directs the progress of the world. The events in our personal lives teach us to love one another by trusting, relying, and depending on our Good Shepherd for all things. The events in Holy Scripture are guided by the Holy Spirit to ensure the history of His love is permanently written in the context of the world; and, to establish the reality of forgiveness we have today.

God prepares His people. And while we do not do anything to prepare for an event that cannot be forecasted, we are called to participate in the preparations of ourselves to receive our Lord Jesus Christ. So how exactly do we prepare in a manner that aligns with Holy Scripture? Too many times, we want to change behaviors and find that we fall short. Too many times we make the best of plans only to see them also fall short. Too many times we make resolutions to better our life and the lives of those around us only to realize we do not have the strength or will power that is truly required to make our desired changes a new lifestyle.

To prevent falling short in our preparations for the Lord, we do exactly what our Lord tells us; “keep awake.” Meaning, keep the faith, hope, and joy in knowing that this world and all that is in it has been conquered and defeated. The sorrow will become joy, the sadness will become happiness, the fear will become peace, and the grieving will become a gathering of renewed and raised up life with all the people of God.

To keep the hope and the faith is not any easier than keeping the promises we make to ourselves. However, to keep faith and hope in the Day of the Lord is Jesus’ words to us, meaning the Holy Spirit within us is keeping the hope and faith very much alive! And because of our faith and hope, we are given the strength to not only bear the trials of this world, but also to help our brothers and sisters in Christ bear their burdens.

My dear friends in Christ, we are those with the cries to the Lord that declare; “Remember Lord, we are all your children! Do not be angry with us forever!” Our cries are for but a single item: love! We are calling upon our Creator to love us as we know love for our children, our parents, our friends, and yes even our pets. We want to feel and know the love that God has declared for us and we openly pray and ask that we all might share this love.

When the darkness comes (again) and we are faced with unparalleled challenges, it is not easy to feel God’s love. When we stumble with every step and decision we make, God’s love is not the first thing we feel. When your heart is ripped apart with loss, pain, and sorrow, we might question where God’s love is at the most difficult times in life. But then, we also choose to bear burdens that are not necessary for us to carry. We have come to the understanding that we must do more, we must try harder, or we must simply ‘get past it’ and move on. My friends, this is not possible and not recommended or commanded by our Lord.

We are told to trust, rely, and depend upon God and His enduring love for us to provide in times of great joy and greater sorrow. The Son will shine and light every moment of our life and we will be given the faith and hope to see, feel, and know this light and love. Yes, here and now!

And it is this very love that is foundational to our Gospel text that again declares a final day of darkness when the elect will be gathered. In these words, there is only hope for humankind and the form of hope that leads to peace, joy, and comfort. God’s own will be gathered and united with Him; protected from every harm. The words have been spoken and the words have been fulfilled.

Jesus clarified that no one, except the Father, knows when this will happen: not even Jesus knows. However, He provides us with the comfort of knowing that the generation, at the time of His mortal life, will be the generation to experience the darkness and the day of the Lord. “In those days after the suffering…” Remember my friends, we are not the only ones to suffer; our Lord suffered greatly for the sins we committed. “Then they will see the ‘Son of Man’ coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” Not all events in Holy Scripture are for humankind to see; these words are true and trustworthy and if we have not seen this, then the beings and powers in the heavenly realms certainly have.

Jesus makes it clear, very clear, that heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of God remains forever. Jesus remains forever and He remains with us; wherever we have gone, wherever we are, and wherever we will go. The season of Advent is all about preparation; preparing humankind for the Gospel, the Good News of God’s love through Christ our Lord.

The psalmist declares the Word of God calling for restoration of the human race. “Let your face shine upon us, and we shall (shall) be saved.” We are prepared for salvation my friends! The prophet Isaiah declares, “And His name shall called; Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Our God in the human form of Jesus walked among us and did shine His face upon us with blessings of life and peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen.