

**First Sunday of Advent – Year C
(Dec. 3, 2006)**

Hope from on High

Jesus was born about two thousand years ago. All the time before the people had been hoping for him, in so many ways, with each sigh, with each misunderstanding, with each bit of suffering, after each departure, at each death, all that time.

In our own day children hang empty stockings or put an empty shoe by the chimney before Christmas, and that is still an expression, a symbol, a sign of the everlasting hope that gifts will come down from above. It is not a mere coincidence that Santa Claus comes down the chimney with his sack full of Christmas presents, gifts coming down from above, another sign that all desires, all hopes and wishes will be fulfilled.

There are millions people starving in Africa, the continent that Jesus knew as a refugee, people who are looking into the sky each day hoping for some gift from above, some relief, some beans, some corn, some oil.

In a city like Chicago just a few years ago over two hundred thousand people were sleeping on the streets. How many do that today in Washington? People who are looking for some shelter just as the parents of Jesus did the night he was born.

Christ was born two thousand years ago but there is less peace in the air than there was when the angels sang that night. The air now seems full of danger, war planes, planes crashing into buildings, satellites that have great potential for good, but that can also threaten not only new-born babes in Bethlehem, but all of us as well.

Jesus had talked about returning to his Father, that's true, but hadn't he also assigned the disciples their tasks? Hadn't he entrusted his home, his people, this world, to his followers, to care for them as he had cared. Hadn't he said, "When you do it to one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you do it to me." He said it to them, but he said it to all of us as well. They seemed to have understood that they had been equipped as he was to fulfill all desires, to heal all wounds, to bring all around one table.

Our Gospel today tells us that hope still comes from on high. "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. . . . Do not let that day catch you by surprise like a trap.”

Our Advent attitude, then, is one of hoping, of looking into the sky with eager longing and expectation of gifts from above. But our hoping and longing is not a passive waiting. The marvelous thing about the Advent season is that we think not only about the first time Jesus came so many years ago, and not only the time he will come again at the end of things to gather us all together into the peace and joy of his Father’s Kingdom. We also think about the daily coming of Jesus into our lives. The fact is he never entirely went away. He is still with us. He comes daily into our lives in so many ways. He comes in the Word of God that we read in sacred scripture. He comes in our Eucharistic celebrations when we receive him and he becomes one with us and helps us to be one with one another, and he comes to us in so many other ways, some of them most surprising. Remember how those people who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, sheltered the homeless, visited the sick and imprisoned, remember how surprised they were when he told them they were doing it to him? They had not the faintest idea that he was there.

And isn’t that true of us as well? Remember that he told us that he would be back and he did not want to find us asleep. A good question to ask ourselves and to pray about during this Advent season is simply this: are we asleep in a world that needs to wake up? Again and again we have to remind ourselves: he is coming. Rather he is already here. Are we ready to welcome him?