

**First Sunday of Advent – Year C
(Nov. 29, 2009)**

Season of Hope

To the people of Maria Madre de Los Pobres from the people of Holy Trinity Church, greetings and prayers and an Advent message:

Jesus was born about two thousand years ago. During all the many years before that 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, during all those years.

In our own day in many countries children hang empty stockings or put an empty shoe by the chimney before Christmas, and that is still a symbol, a sign of the everlasting hope that gifts will come down from above. It is not a mere coincidence that in our country 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.

Our Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent 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 about 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, 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 very surprised they were when he told them they were doing it to him? They had not the faintest idea he was there. And isn't that true of us as well?

The fact that we here at Holy Trinity and you at Maria Madre de Los Pobres can reach across borders in love and friendship is another sign of hope in a world that is so much in need of compassion and reconciliation. Last Sunday on the feast of Christ the King we heard about the Kingdom Jesus wishes to present to our Father in heaven: a Kingdom of justice, love, and peace. But we have to remember that the Gospel we will hear on Christmas Day tells us that that same Jesus was born in a stable and knew what it meant to be poor. Later he would be arrested, tortured, and finally executed horribly on a cross. The Kingdom does not come easily – and yet come it must. Because after the cross and death there was resurrection.

We are aware of the damage that the recent storms have caused in your parish, and we know how difficult this must be for you. Know that you are in our prayers and that we will do what we can to help. Please keep us in your prayers as well so that together we may all joyfully greet the Prince of Peace on Christmas Day. We can be confident that he will fulfill all our hopes.