Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior and source of hope Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the 1st Sunday in Advent. I love this time of year when we know it is time to prepare for the coming of Christ where the world is changed forever. The sanctuary is decorated, preparing us for that magical time when God joins us on earth incarnate as a new born baby. Advent means coming or beginning or start. Advent is not a single day but rather a season and is a time before Christmas that gives us space to prepare for a meaningful Christmas as we try to counter act the consumerism of the holiday. Also, it is a time to contemplate the mystery of our faith: the life, death and the resurrection of our Lord and what this means for us along with the second coming of our Lord and Savior.

Today, we light the first candle on the Advent wreath which represents hope, hope for the universe. Hope in the person of Jesus Christ who is the Way, and the Truth and the Life. Hope that laid as a vulnerable infant in a trough in the manger. Hope that caused the angels to sing as did who sang the Magnificat “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” Luke 1:46-55 NRSV

This is the hope that caused the shepherds to come worship and the Magi who traveled quite a distance to bring gifts to this lowly baby in a manger. This is hope because of the coming of the Christ Child who set helpless people free from sin. Nothing they or anybody else could do could save them or us from sin. Otherwise we are doomed. Only God’s action will save us from the ravages of sin. (John 3:16 God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whosoever will believe in him will have eternal life.)

Other weekly themes coming up for lighting the candle for the Sundays leading to Christmas are peace, joy and love, with the candle in the middle representing the light of Christ as finally being lit to a new beginning. We know Jesus came to us but it is a mystery when Jesus will come again. So, our readings this first Sunday of Advent begin not with a reference to Jesus’ impending birth but with the “coming of the Son of Man” at an unexpected hour. Since we do not know what time this is as we live in the tension of “now and not yet” we prepare for the unknown time in Advent, trying to focus on those things that will distract us from the commercialization of Jesus birth. We gather for worship, we attend mis-week soup gatherings, we read scripture and do bible study, we pray, do devotions, and serve others. There is no Black Friday. We do not have to go to extraordinary shopping to get the perfect gift. Because of our belief in Christ we already have the perfect gift from God - eternity. God’s word does not pass away. The cost? It is free. We then use this freedom to follow Christ who gave himself for us as we serve others knowing that everything is okay. Our hope is in the person of Jesus Christ. Amen.