

THE JOURNEY ENDS AND THE JOURNEY BEGINS

As we enter the holy season of Advent, the beginning of the liturgical year, people all over the world will join together in the spiritual journey toward Christ. This series will reflect upon different stages of life, beginning with life's end, to the concerns of aging, to mid-life, to childhood and finally to the birth of the infant Jesus.

In the lectionary for the first Sunday of Advent, the prophet Isaiah calls us: *"O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"* In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus calls us to stay awake, to be prepared, to pay attention, to be ready. Life is unpredictable, he says. Be alert, *"for you do not know on which day your Lord will come."*

We must learn how to live while we wait. We make our journey from the dark of uncertainty to the light of God. "Grant us thy peace," we ask. Show us the way to the light.

It is midnight in the ICU. Lights are dimmed. The monitors make quiet beeping sounds. The staff walk quietly in soft-soled shoes, alert and ready to respond to their patients' needs. The long night is ahead of them. The small waiting room shelters a family maintaining a vigil. Through the long night they fidget restlessly in chairs not fashioned for sleeping. As a long and loving life winds down, they prepare for the days to come after she is gone.

In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul admonishes the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ to love one another in the time they have left to them. *"And do this,"* he says, *"because you know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. ... Put on the armor of light."*

Advent is about carrying our lives forward, yearning for the One who made us and has saved us. Our destination is with God. In the words of T.S. Eliot:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*