***Acts 1:9-11 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”***

This is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a time of Spiritual preparation for the Season we find ourselves entering. Many have been preparing financially or materially, but the most critical thing we can do to truly celebrate the meaning of Christmas is prepare ourselves spiritually, aligning our season with Jesus. We prepare with study of His word, meditation on our relationship, and repentance. We place Christ firmly at the front of our Christmas, and never take our eyes off Him throughout. Advent is Latin for Arrival or Coming. Jesus arrived the first time as a Babe in the manger. Now, we await His Second Coming, His Advent, when He will come again as Conquering King, placing all things under His rule. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to see Jesus today? To look fully into His face and know we are finally home. I get excited when I think of Him coming again = maybe today is the day! But, if not, I’ll surrender my life, submit my plans, and serve my King… because, tomorrow might be the day!

This morning, we lit the candle of Faith. Without Faith, there is no Hope, Joy, Peace, or Love in Jesus. If we do not first believe, we can in no way receive His blessings. We have Faith that Jesus came and He is coming again. This morning, we’re standing with the disciples and Jesus on the Mount of Olives. Imagine yourself there. This mount is higher and allows a view of the Temple and Jerusalem. We see the risen Savior. He gives us our command found in Matthew 28 to go and spread the gospel to all nations. Now, we read in verses 9-10 *Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,* Jesus speaks the Great Commission and is taken up. This is known as the Ascension. Jesus came, taking the form of a bondservant, not considering it robbery to leave His place of majesty, to bring Salvation to the world. The disciples are looking intently at Him and, while they watch, He returns and takes His rightful place at the right hand of God. The disciples stand and look up, the Greek holds the idea of looking intently, with full focus. Their eyes follow Him, from where He is standing, as He rises, not with a sudden zip, but a steady rise, up into the clouds, until they can no longer see Him. We have every reason to suspect that the cloud that received Him is like the cloud that led the children of Israel in the wilderness, the cloud that enveloped Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and the glory of the Lord that shone around the shepherds on the night of Jesus birth. The Jewish people call this cloud Shechinah. And we have every reason to suspect that this will be the cloud that brings the Son of Man back, as we read in Matthew 16:27 when Jesus said – *For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.*  While they looked up, two men stood by them.

Verse 11 the two men speak - *who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”* There’s our promise. There’s our promise! He’s coming again! We have Faith that He is coming again. Two men, dressed like the two in Luke 24 that met the women at the tomb on Resurrection morning, in white, almost surely angels, say – He’s coming again. Jesus Himself says – I’m coming again in Revelation 22:20. And we say, with Faith and full belief, He’s coming again.

Faith, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Are we living as though we believe? Do we wake each morning in expectation that today may be the day? Is our walk the walk of the expectant? Do our words reflect our hope? And, if today is not the day, do we lay our heads down each night, not disappointed, but enthusiastic? Because tomorrow might be the day, when Jesus comes and takes us home. I hope so.

This week, let’s resolve to make this whole season about Christ more. When we put up the tree, consider the root of Jesus. When we string the lights, let’s praise the Light of this world. When we bake cookies, let’s think of the Bread of Life. When we pick up our glass, let’s think of the Living Water. When we look at the boxes, with bows and ribbons, let’s think of the most Precious Gift given. Most of all, no matter who we may be inviting for Christmas, let’s listen for the sound of Christ coming, waiting breathlessly in Faith. He says – *Surely, I am coming quickly.* Let’s respond with all of our heart – *Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus!*