

- Let us pray. Almighty and eternal God, grant that the words which are spoken in this place, maybe received in so far as they are thy word into good and faithful hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. And I see that mechanism has taken over all so, in Duke Chapel. It may as well be admitted from the start that since Tuesday, when I was obliged to give my sermon topic, but I have composed the sermon and its title must now need to be changed. To the title I must add a word, the word when. So now it reads, what, where and when is Advent? And I think I find that the added word is all important. I confess it is not always easy to preach in Duke Chapel. Sometimes I find it difficult. I think because the preacher does not know to whom he speaks, and you are very far off. I have found it a specially arduous task this week, partly because it has been my lot to preach many Advents sermons here. And so I ask, is there an added word to say today? In straits like this, I sometimes ask for help from my family. My small daughter, with delight for irresponsibility suggested I preach about horses. Though I suppose she meant reindeers. Another member, since the scouts are here today in the body, suggested a children's sermon. And so I shall try, with the understanding that the Christian faith, commends itself only to children in spirit. Since our Lord declared, "No one enters the Kingdom of God except as a little child." And that I suppose is what after all is signified to us, if we will look more closely than we ordinarily do. That is what is signified to us, by the child in the humble manger bed at Bethlehem. But now our theme. what, where and when is Advent? Surely the revolving seasons of the Christian year, serve to remind us of the great themes of the Christian faith. This is their purpose and justification. As for Advent it is doubtless, the most beloved, as it is the most joyous season of the Christian year. Notice I say Christian year, for Advent is not at all a season of the secular year. Although it is certainly been appropriated by the world, and now mingles its meaning confusingly with that patron saint of trade and commerce, known for his jocular rotundity and peaked red hat. Advent I say is a joyous season. It is so because it is the time, when Christian people everywhere prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Him whose matchless life, so divided all the past that was before Him, from the sublime fulfillment that was in Him, that all subsequent history came to be reckoned from the year of His birth. And all dominate the year of the Lord, is for Christians the dividing line between the age of the prophets. Of longing and of hope deferred, and the age of promise, the age of hope fulfilled. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews says, "God having of old time spoken unto the fathers and the prophets, has at the end of these days, spoken unto us in His son." For these reasons, Advent is a joyous season, a season of heightened expectation. But if this is all we mean by Advent, then it is really not hard to understand. It is a stretch of time filled by the four Sundays before Christmas. As such it is a period in the ecclesiastical calendar. It is celebrated in the church with distinctive liturgy and music. These are singularly pure and beautiful in themselves. It is the time of Christmas carol, of folk song and of Handel's Messiah. It occupies the month of December, until the 12 days of Christmas, and is eventually succeeded by more normal routines that follow the pagan festival of new years. Then we are back again, admittedly, possibly somewhat worse for where in the workaday world of the common round of duties to be done. Man, we look forward to summer vacation. Is this Advent? If so, then here, what we have it's what? And it's where? And it's when? And that's the pity of it. If Advent is simply a season of the Christian year, then it is more nearly something we pass through, than something that passes through us. We may have experienced the season, caught something of it's honest, cheer and grace,

but we easily fail to grasp and be grasped by what it signifies. For the season of Advent points beyond itself, to a reality in the life of Christian people in all ages. And that reality is, newness of life, the new life of humanity in Jesus Christ, and its watch word is, "Behold I make all things new." Its distinctive message, is summarized for us in John's gospel. "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world knew Him not. He came onto His own, and they that were His own, received Him not, but as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to be called the children of God." And then John adds, "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us." So we ask once more, "What, where, and when is Advent?" What is Advent? According to John's gospel, It is Jesus Christ Himself. It is the word made flesh that dwelt among us, whose glory was recognized by some, but not by all. But for those who had eyes to see, it was the fulfillment of Israel's ancient hope, so long before. Where is Advent?, According to St. John, it is wherever the word made flesh is received rather than rebuffed and rejected. It is wherever man reversed themselves and commit their highest loyalty, their whole devotion to God and his kingdom. When is Advent? Again according to St. John, it is when the old life of men is born a new, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. It is when to use St Paul's words, "There is through faith, a transition from the life of sin to the life of righteousness. Which for him is a passage from death to life." There's mystery here. So let us look more closely at the what? And the where? And the when of Advent. Only this morning we shall reverse the more natural order, and begin with the when? Proceed to the where? And finally consider the what? Now if we ask the question, when is Advent? The New Testament abounds with answers, yet we tend to ignore them because our attention focuses too readily upon the what? And even upon the how? In general the New Testament answer about the when of Advent, is that it occurs whenever men and women, so encounter the power of Christ's spirit, is that the prevailing inner conflicts of loyalty in their lives that divide men against themselves is resolved in favor of God, of His kingdom and of His righteousness. Consider Jesus. He began His ministry in Galilee with an announcement, with a summon to His people. "The time is fulfilled." He said. "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the good news. Advent occurs when men actually face and accept for themselves, the time as a time of repentance, heed the summons to decision, revise the order of their values, and commit themselves to a course that by contrast with the old one, makes all things new. So far Zacchaeus, republican of Jericho, the tax farmer of scheming, and miserly traits of ruthless and unscrupulous dealing. For Zacchaeus the encounter with Jesus, was an unforeseen, and unforeseeable time for decision, and for entrance upon a new life. It was not a time Zacchaeus had sought. This unlikely candidate for salvation climbed a Sycamore tree to have a better look at the celebrity passing through, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. Perhaps a half disguised and roughly repressed his quiet, prompted Zacchaeus to venture forth that day, for a glimpse of Jesus, we shall never know. Suddenly to his astonishment, the man perched in the Sycamore tree, who came only to look on, discovers himself a chief character in the act. Jesus intrudes Himself upon the life and anonymity of one who had no desire even to be noticed, least of all to be disturbed. Zacchaeus' time had come. It was fulfilled. He clambered from his perch, and confirmed joyfully the invitation which all unsolicited, Jesus had asked for Himself, for Jesus was always, and still is though, unwanted, asking Himself into our lives. "Behold," He says, "I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him, and sup with him and he with me." Zacchaeus opened the door, the door of his life. And as Jesus walked in, all that was mean and blow. All that was sorted and depraved, was painfully revealed in the light of the now illuminated interior. The time was fulfilled. The time for repentance had come, the Kingdom of God had drawn nigh. A wave of revulsion overwhelmed Zacchaeus as the mean and shabby trappings of his inner life stood disclosed in all

their dreary, and pretentious impoverishment. The majestic calm, and crystalline goodwill of Jesus was shriveling, and annihilating the demons of self-interest, which had long held tenancy there. And the dwarf in the stunted soul which had imprisoned itself within defensive wall of its own self making burst its bars. It heard the summons to repentance and it heeded it. It capitulated to the transparent goodness, confronting it in the person of Jesus. Zaccheus had made entrance into the kingdom, in company with all true sons of Abraham. For Zaccheus stood and said, "Behold, Lord. The half of my goods, I give unto the poor. And if I have wronged for the exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold." This is capitulation. This is repent. This is decision. This is restitution, and this is Advent. When is Advent? Jesus said, "Today is salvation come to this house? When is Advent? It is whenever man resolve the division and conflict between love of self, and love of God, and becometh one with their Maker. It is whenever there is passage from an old to a new order of being and living. And the New Testament is full of instances of such passage. The pages are loaded with them. It happened to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. When Saul ceased to be a persecutor of Christ, and surrendered to Him, and was renamed Paul. Advent happened in the life of the apostle Peter belatedly went in his total self defeat. Peter cried out to the one upon the shore of the lake of Galilee, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Here is proper self-understanding, and where Christ is recognized, many they must repent and confess Him as Lord like Zaccheus, or they cannot abide Him, and must reject Him. Jesus impels them to come away from what they are. And if they cannot abide Him, they become alienated and hostile like the Pharisees, or they go away sorrowful, like the rich ruler. But those who receive Him, to them He still gives, the right to become sons of God. But now where is Advent? From what has been said about the when, plainly Advent is anywhere men have really tangled with Jesus Christ. And in that engagement, have recognized the time of fulfillment, their hour when they could no longer postpone decision for God. When they can no longer settle for what they are, and are forced to find a resolution for the anxiety of perpetual postponement and compromise, through a decisive commitment. Where is Advent? And it is fulfillment of the angels song for it is the Advent of inner peace. It is the fulfillment of prophecy and an altered key, for where is peace to be found. This is the question of our day. Certainly only where there is integrity of mind, where there is unanimity of the soul with itself through community with its Maker. And since men were finding this through the transformation of life that Jesus evoked, they not only knew Him as Lord, but they saw in Him the fulfillment of the word of Micah the prophet, "This man shall be our peace for thou Bethlehem, which are but little among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall come forth onto me, one that is to be ruler in Israel whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. And this man shall be our peace." Where is Advent? It is wherever men encounter Christ for repentance and transformation of life. It is wherever they are born of God, as John says, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. It is where the kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. And when this happens He shall reign in human hearts forever and ever. But finally what is Advent? Plainly it is the meeting of man with God in such a way as that man is raised to a new level of being, that is above existence. It is a decisive meeting in which reconciliation replaces both alienation, and mere physical dependency. All human existence is always in the power of God, and in the presence of God, but it is not always in the conscious acknowledgement of God. So at Advent man passes from simple factual dependence upon God, to eager and glad community with Him. He accepts God's invitation to come home in his life. But Christians are persuaded that there is one who is the mediator of this community, and this newness of life. Christian faith exalts the one whose word and deed, whose ministry and death were the instrument and mediation of this community. He was one who was born in the age of Caesar Augustus, was

crucified under Pontius Pilate. During the days of His ministry, He came and preached peace to those that were far off, and to those who were near. He called disciples. He healed the sick. Sinners enter the kingdom under the power of His word in person. Those who might have been expected to welcome and receive His message, rejected both it and Him. While those who had no special expectation of salvation received Him gladly, and found Him to be the way, the truth, and the light. So as Simon had foretold in the temple, Jesus was set for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which is spoken against. Thus He came unto His own, but His own received Him not. They still reject Him, and some even vilify His name, partly because they have suffered on numbered wrongs from men who bear the name of Christian. But there were many not offended in Him, who received Him gladly, out of experience of new life and community with God. These testified and still testify today that as many as receive Him, to them gives He the right to become children of God. And these who testify are convinced that Jesus Christ gives this right and power because He is Himself Son of God, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. They testify even today that this man is our peace, because they know it in experience. They declared with St. John, that the eternal word of God's purpose to community with man was made flesh in Christ and has dwelled among us. They so testify, because they must speak out of the new life which He imparts. And so they say, "We beheld His glory. Glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." What is Advent? It is the reign of God in the human life so that He shall reign forever and ever. It is such a reign as is visible in Christ and in lesser magnitude, in those who receive Him. For again, Advent is what Saint Paul called, the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. But I would warn you, that this glory is visible only to those who receive Him. This has been a children's sermon, despite what you think. For none receive Him except as a little child, such that is who are not so sufficient in their own pettiness as to receive His everlasting greatness. Amen. Let us pray. Oh, holy child of Bethlehem. Listen to us, we pray, cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today We hear the Christmas angels, the great, glad tidings tale. Oh come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel. And now onto God's gracious care and keeping I commit you. The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.