The year is 1993. The European Community eliminates trade barriers and creates a European single market. The Bombay Riots take place in the city now known as Mumbai. The World Wide Web is born at the European Organization for Nuclear Research CERN. Software specialist Peter de Jager publishes in Computerworld U.S. weekly magazine an article Doomsday 2000, which is the first known reference to Y2K – the 2000 Year problem. In South Africa, 21 political parties approve a new constitution.

Amidst all this change in the world, we in South Africa found ourselves in one of the most violent times in our history. We knew that voting for the first time democratically was inevitable. Seeing the gift of voting was a problem for some for there were real forces that did not want a smooth Democracy to happen. The Third Force wanted the ‘whites to pay.’ Amy Biehl, a 26 year old American working to fight Racism died in the Guguletu black township outside Cape Town when a crowd of black youth stoned her car, then beat and stabbed her. The killing drew international attention to South Africa’s racial violence. Anglican Churches were attacked and bombed. To vote together would be the new beginning. To vote together as a people of all ethnicities and culture would be the hope. It was the Church, our Church that let us live into that hope.

Jeremiah the prophet is a triumph of faith and courage. In the midst of
terrible difficulty, he spoke with conviction and strength. He was virtually the only one who saw clearly what was going on. His dedication to the call of God was such that he never wavered. Because of this, he is a monument for all times of how to live when darkness surrounds us. On this first week of advent – the season of waiting for the coming of the Lord – we might think that this short reading from Jeremiah serves only as a preamble to the Gospel reading, Luke 2:25-36. Yes, it does look forward to the distant fulfillment of the promise that there will be a descendant of David who will ‘execute justice and righteousness’, a promise that will later form the basis of messianic belief. But it also has something to say about the ‘present’, about living as people who hold a promise.

The context of Jer. 33:14-16 is important. In terms of the story in Jeremiah, the city of Jerusalem is under siege by the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar and the people will shortly go into exile (Jer. 32:1-6). Jeremiah is in prison (Jer. 32:2; 33:1). The people are about to lose everything that has given meaning to their lives – temple, city, king, priesthood, their homes, family etc. God seems to be silent, absent, and preoccupied with judging the people for past wrongs. But in terms of the literary context, Jeremiah falls within that part of Jeremiah known as the Book of Consolation, which as the name suggests, gives hope to the people.
Advent is not just about something in the future. It is as much about the reform of our present ways: the ways we govern ourselves, share wealth and responsibility, organize our communal life, and prepare ourselves for the future. Waiting for the Lord’s coming is not an idle, passive activity. It is waiting that is passionate and active. It is about calling for reform in the world, personal and social. In Jeremiah’s case it was about speaking from prison about hope beyond exile, of envisioning that through commitment to the old covenant expectations there would be a day when again the sound of joy would be heard in the streets. Jeremiah hopes not only that one day will there be a king who will reshape the people’s lives, but that, even against all that circumstance dictates, kingship itself would be reshaped so as to make new life possible. If there is any cause for hope in the Lord’s coming to us, it is in this proclamation. The source of energy behind any hope for the present or future is God’s own word and action, and God’s challenge to present realities, present structures of society and church, and present visions of what is possible. Jeremiah’s hope was deeply rooted in God’s love and faithfulness, and in God’s own speech and concern about the political, social, religious, and personal dimensions of community life. Advent is not just about waiting for God to fulfill God’s promise. It is also about our being transformed through waiting. The same proclamation is given today to us, inheritors of Jeremiah’s task. We are called to speak a word of hope and promise in a world often filled with fear
and uncertainty, even despair. Especially in this season of Advent, we speak words of hope. In the midst of darkness, light is about to break in. In the midst of despair, hope erupts and breaks in. After long waiting, a branch will sprout. The complete fulfillment of God's promises has not yet happened, but it is coming. Such is Advent faith, and Advent hope. What a time and opportunity we have here at St. Matthew's to see ourselves the way God sees us. Beloved. This is the time, the season to break ourselves open to the hope and be a light in the world. We have already started this work as a community. St. Matthew's lit it's candle of hope to the world at the Christmas Faire. St. Matthew's gives hope to all our brothers and sisters in need. This is a good and joyful thing. May this hope dwell with each of you to each other. There is a sweet sweet Spirit in this place and we have the power to live into newness. Be transformed this Advent season and break open to hope. The light will pierce the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. Imagine, being part of the light in a world that challenges social rhetoric that states, NO God is a figment of your imagination. A song by Kirk Franklin entitled Imagine Me speaks about letting go and trusting in the Lord and what could happen when we LET GO AND BREAK OPEN. Letting go of all of those who hurt me, those who try to control me to live differently. Imagine being free trusting Jesus totally. Letting go of the past and dance in the present. The song is dedicated to everyone like himself who didn't feel good enough, pretty
enough, dedicated to those with low self-esteem, who struggle with insecurities and acceptance. Email me and I will share this song with you.

Let us this Advent season allow God to whisper our name. I wonder what would happen. I imagine God whispering our name, lighting the fire of your hearts as we live in hope and letting us know that every bad thing that has ever happened to you is gone. You get to start again. Hating yourself gone. Depression gone, feeling unloved gone. I'm a new creature washed in baptism. This is the hope we are capable of this Advent season. Since being welcomed in this wonderful church, I thank you for radical hospitality and warm smiles. St. Matthew's has been so wonderful in making Jonah, Angela and I feel like family. And so because we're family we don't need to be shy with each other right? So I invite you to turn to the person next to you and if you visiting us for the first time today this does not usually happen. Turn to the person next to you, and share with them the one thing you hope for this Advent Season! What is the one thing you hope for this Advent season? Hold onto your hope friends because the ride is going to get rough according to Med Yones, President of the International Institute of Management and Economic Guru according to CEO Magazine. Yones suggest that Obama’s fiscal stimulus package, bailout and other economic policies can soften the fall, but are unlikely to reverse it anytime soon. We expect to see the bottom fall out around late 2009 or early 2010. The real
estate, construction and financial industries will bottom in 2010, the recovery could start in 2011. The Fed will slash the Interest Rates and maintain rates near zero. Prices will deflate in general, especially for national products and services. Imported material costs will rise, due to the weakening of the dollar, and California’s projected budget crisis will hit 25 billion dollars. In this coming season, how will be like Jeremiah giving a voice of hope when all seem’s bleak and helpless?

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Old Testament

Zechariah 14:4-9

On the day of the LORD his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. And you shall flee by the valley of the LORD's mountain, for the valley between the mountains shall reach to Azal; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

On that day there shall not be either cold or frost. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the LORD), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light.

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer as in winter.

And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one.

The Epistle

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.


Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near."