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## Advent 1 • 1 Corinthians 1:3–9 • November 30, 2014

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The church journeys into Advent, anticipating renewal in the vital proclamation of Jesus’s incarnation—embodied grace in the embryo of a woman’s womb. The church becomes that vessel of incarnate grace where we are saturated in baptismal living waters that have claimed, redeemed, and forgiven us. The Church remains an eternal community gathered around the table of Eucharist grace—where, by faith, we receive the real, incarnate, inseparable, incredible forgiveness food of Jesus’s own body and blood in bread and wine. Abundant grace is revealed, proclaimed, and preached in the word. Abundant grace soaks, nourishes, recreates, and feeds us in the sacraments. Abundant grace in life and death strives and thrives for God’s believing and broken people!

Paul’s inaugural greeting infuses grace language into the Corinthian church. This is intentional. This is profound. Christian invocation and benediction decrees grace to the faith-filled keeping us connected and inseparable from the name of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is our liturgical ritual, the grammar of our dialog in worship and community. Grace repeatedly forms us as Christians. We receive book-ended grace; it initiates us into the Christian faith, it sustains us and finishes our paradoxical oscillating journey between rebellion and redemption, rebellion and redemption, rebellion and redemption, over and over again. Without God’s intervening grace in Christ Jesus, life would end only in death—a mortal finish line!

Rend the heavens and come down is an incipit of an Advent collect that hints at the enormity of God’s intervention! Advent is not just anticipatory of a saccharin-sweet nativity story, but bona fide bitter judgment against sin! Heaven and earth collide and are mingled in Jesus! God and man! Jesus is wrapped in human flesh; the world is wrapped in divine grace . . . a God-given shield and armor defending us against overt satanic assault and evil’s subtle, deceptive influence. God grace is sufficient to safeguard us. God grace is steadfast through life. God grace keeps us buoyant until that final day of judgment, the resurrection of flesh, and eternity’s unrivaled revelation—our immortal un-finish line!

The church treasures the counsels of God and throughout its rituals, symbols, catechesis, and preaching evangelizes the world with gospel! Our confession of faith in repetitive cyclical liturgies—ancient, apostolic, catholic, contextual, confessional—shape our dialog and our community with the Triune God and give us solidarity in our communion gathered around word and table. The church's speech and song on our lips and in our ears continually announces unfathomable divine grace. It is our endeavor to speak divine truth into our own contexts; to engage our intellects into understanding the Holy Scriptures . . . and to care for our fellowship of believers with unrelenting love.

Redemption from our loving God in Christ Jesus is our chief gift. God alone directs, aims, and claims our hearts making us recipients, agents, and disciples of the redemption story. Redemption in Christ is the final cadence in a grand symphony. God creates, composes, directs, and inspires all of our gifts and weaves all of our distinct counterpoints into community . . . into being one holy people. God's speech and knowledge creates, redeems, sustains, and orchestrates Church. Jesus's incarnation graces this holy church, this bride of Christ, on a baptized trajectory toward the marriage feast of the Lamb where guiltless saints are fed with him forever.