

Pope begins Advent by asking Christians to be signs of hope

VATICAN CITY – In their prayers and through their actions in Advent, Christians are called to be signs of hope for a world marked by holiness and justice, Pope Benedict XVI said.

“Advent is the spiritual season of hope par excellence, when the whole church is called to become hope for itself and for the world,” the pope said Nov. 29 as he celebrated vespers on the eve of the first Sunday of Advent.

The pope’s homily at the evening prayer service in St. Peter’s Basilica, the morning Mass he celebrated Nov. 30 at Rome’s Basilica of St. Lawrence Outside the Walls and his midday Angelus address at the Vatican afterward all focused on Advent as a time to remember that Christ became human, died for our sins, rose from the dead and will return at the end of time.

Advent hope, he said during the evening prayer service, is a recognition of the ongoing need for salvation.

“We do not await the Lord as some beautiful decoration for a world already saved,” he said, but as the only one who can bring to completion the work begun with his incarnation, death and resurrection.

In his Angelus address, the pope said Advent is a time when Christians prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ by making sure they welcome him fully into their hearts and lives.

But, he said, it also is a time for Christians to set their sights on the end of time and to reform their lives in a way that shows they are ready for the Last Judgment.

“This requires a correct detachment from earthly goods, sincere repentance for one’s errors, concrete acts of charity and, especially, humbly and trustingly placing oneself in the hands of God, our tender and merciful father,” the pope said.

Visiting the parish community at the Basilica of St. Lawrence Outside the Walls, the pope said the Gospel of the first Sunday of Advent urges believers to be watchful and stay awake.

“To watch means to follow the Lord, to choose that which he has chosen, to love that which he loves, to conform one’s life to his,” the pope said.