

Advent II 2017

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.**

On this Second Sunday in Advent, we take a step back from the events at Bethlehem, instead focusing on the Second Advent often referred to as the Second Coming.

With so much focus on the events of Christmas, we often forget that this season also reminds us that Jesus is coming back. Today, in fact, Luke records our Lord's own words describing his return, but it's not what you might expect; certainly not Merry and Bright.

Obviously we don't know when His return will occur, although many to this very day have attempted to predict the hour. What we do know is that it grows ever closer.

According to the words of Jesus, the signs of this coming cataclysm are pretty clear and dramatic. There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars. Of course what those signs are aren't spelled out, and for the most part, we don't read signs in the stars as they did back then. The signs could be as simple as modern man's sudden certainty that a meteor or comet will strike the earth. Or the signs could be something totally unexpected.

Jesus then tells us that there will be dismay among the nations identified with a perplexity at the roaring of the seas and the waves, obviously environmental changes. If you look at the world around us today we're told that the ice caps are melting. The ocean is polluted and life forms are disappearing from it. We hear terms such as El Nina and El Nino, and of course, global warming. And we've seen a remarkable increase in hurricane activity.

And then our Lord points to man. Specifically he says "men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world."

If there is anything we have no shortage of today, it is people quaking with fear over what is happening or what they think is about to happen. If anything, this new millennium has heightened all those fears. Folks are afraid of running out of resources, afraid of terrorists, and natural disasters.

But as I tell people that come to me with such anxiety, I remind them of God's great love for His children.

And in the face of such fears look at what Jesus says, "But when these things begin to happen, straighten up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near." Rather than

fear, Jesus invites us to confidence and hope. Lift up your heads and don't cower in fear as though something unexpected is happening. Be positive and know with confidence that Our Lord Returns in Glory.

Is the end coming? Yes. As Christians we believe this. But it will not be because of Global Warming, Flooding, or some Monster Rock from outer space. It will happen in God's time and at His command and we will know with great certainty when it is occurring.

Yes. Jesus says it will happen and then reminds us that His promises and His Salvation and His love is more permanent than the earth below or the sky above. Even as the world will come unraveled and undone, His love and His promises and His Salvation are unshaken and sure. As He says, "Heaven and Earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

So what do we do with a passage like this? As I mentioned earlier, it's not Merry and Bright. But then, not everything is.

Well, unlike the Adventists Sects or individuals that have given us the date, time, and events surrounding the Second Coming, we don't attempt to predict it. In fact, we are not supposed to. What Jesus does say is to be prepared, to be on guard. Those are the

words He used. Be on guard against the unrealistic and unbelieving fears. Be on guard against the foolishness that cannot understand the events around us.

Lest we forget, Advent is a penitential season. While the world is done up in red and green, we are donning purple. While the airwaves and stores play festive holiday music, we sing hymns with lyrics such as “ransom captive” and “mourns in lonely exile.” While everyone around us is in full party mode, we encourage fasting and penance. Indeed for Christians, these weeks are supposed to be a time of serious reflection; a time to prepare ourselves for His return in Glory. But can we say with complete confidence that we are where we want to be spiritually?

Unfortunately, we often let “things” get in the way. Later in this same Gospel passage, we are told that Jesus’s return will be so unexpected that it will close on us like a trap.

But we think we know best and when this attitude takes hold, we attempt to juggle the worldly and the spiritual.

For instance, everyone knows that you shouldn’t text while driving or even while walking. So why do so many people attempt such

things? Well, it's because they think they can safely multitask, which of course, they cannot.

Are we spiritually like these? Thinking we can keep one eye on the lookout for Jesus while pouring our time and energy into making the starting line up or earning a bonus or spending countless hours surfing the net?

The point is, don't become distracted. Advent, like Lent, is a time to purge the bad and promote the good. And a trusted and true exercise to stay on track is frequent recitation of the Lord's Prayer. These are, after all, the words Jesus wanted said. One of the lines in this prayer says, "Thy Kingdom Come."

Do you realize that each time you repeat those words you are anticipating our Lord's Return?

Unfortunately, the Lord's Prayer, just like the General Confession and so many others, is often said so quickly that any meaning flies right by.

Advent is a time to slow down, not speed up. Folks will often say to me, "I say my prayers everyday, but just don't seem to feel anything." Well, if you are praying like an auctioneer, that could be the reason.

We could all stand to slow down a bit, especially during the hustle and bustle in the weeks ahead.

Jesus will return. On this we are clear. But His second Coming doesn't have to be feared.

Jesus reminds, "when these "things", these tragedies and calamities begin to occur, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption has arrived."

"Redemption" means to "buy back." You see, Jesus paid the price for our sins on the Cross. But that was only part 1. Part II of His mission takes place when He returns to take us to heaven.

There's much more that could be said: the symbolism of the fig tree; the reference to the lineage of Jesus through the root of Jesse. But all of these point to one and the same event: the anticipation of the arrival of Jesus, First, at Bethlehem which is recognized as the feast of our redemption, and Second as King and Judge when He returns in Glory.

May we all remain sober and alert, for the hour is nearer than when we first believed.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.