

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Advent 2 – December 8, 2024
Luke 21:25-36 – The Final Coming
Rev Peter Wagner

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Advent means coming. As in, the coming of Christ. In Advent we prepare for the coming of Christ. And certainly we are preparing for his coming at Christmas, God with Us in the manger at Bethlehem, preparing our hearts to rejoice in his incarnation, born with us and live and die for us, the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.

But that is not his only coming. Advent comprehends all three comings of Christ: First, his advent and coming in the flesh in ancient times. Second, his advent and coming to us now in the church through his means of grace. And third, his advent and coming to us on the Last Day, to raise the dead and judge the world and destroy the earth with fire.

For the same Lord who was born of the virgin Mary in ancient times also comes to us now, in the church, through his word and sacraments, through preaching, and baptism, and the Lord's Supper, to bring us the benefits of forgiveness and salvation that he won for us on the cross.

And the same Lord will also come again at the end of the age with his angels, to gather the nations and raise the dead and judge the earth, separating the sheep on his right and the goats on his left, to condemn all who rejected him to eternal death, but to bring those who put their trust in him into the courts of his kingdom forever.

It is this third and final coming which is our theme today. "For behold," says the prophet Malachi, "The day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." And Jesus himself says the same, "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

Therefore, look carefully how you walk. Prepare yourself for the day of wrath, for Christ is surely coming soon.

And that day will be a day of terror and anguish, when they see the Son of Man coming with power and great glory. Many will faint with fear, when they realize that everything the Bible predicted, everything they laughed and brushed off as foolishness, all of it was true.

It is true. Jesus is truly coming soon. Already we can see many of the signs he foretold: wars, and disasters, turmoil and chaos in the earth. These signs are meant to wake us up, so we do not slacken the fight or lose hope of the victory.

So today is an earnest, final call. Prepare yourself. Wake up, be alert! Do not be caught unawares, with the door shut, locked outside in the terrible outer darkness. Stay awake, that you may not be among the evildoers reduced to stubble, but you may be counted among the righteous, counted righteous by faith, rejoicing in the eternal triumph of the Lord of Hosts.

And with this warning in view, knowing that the Day of the Lord is at hand, our readings today instruct us how we should live.

Immediately after describing the coming day, burning like an oven, to reduce all evildoers to stubble, the Old Testament reading from Malachi tells us, "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and just decrees that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel."

The day is coming. So remember the law of Moses, the Ten Commandments. Examine yourself, asking yourself if you are keeping God's entire law as you ought from the heart.

Because Advent is a penitential season. This is a good time to examine yourself according to the Ten Commandments. And it's a good time to go to private confession and absolution with your pastor, confessing your sins privately and hearing the absolution of Jesus applied directly to you.

And immediately after telling us that heaven and earth will pass away, Jesus in the gospel also instructs us, "Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap."

Watch yourselves. Live in constant repentance, turning from sin. Do not let the cares of this world drag you down, lest the day of judgment come upon you unexpectedly.

How simple these instructions are, and yet how difficult to keep! All too easily we forget God's word. We want to do what is right, but we fail. We resolve to do better, to make the best use of the time, but we squander and waste our efforts.

Because we love distractions. Perhaps you share my struggle. Every day, I make plans for all that I'm going to accomplish. I commit myself to tackling everything methodically, one job at a time. But I fail. I love to get sidetracked. I forget whatever I intended to do, gladly chasing after anything else. So time slips away, and before I know it, the day is gone.

It's because procrastination is in our nature. No matter how hard we try, we can't stay focused. Time slips through our fingers, and then we feel miserable about our lack of self-discipline.

And if we're so prone to procrastinate in worldly, everyday life, then how much worse is it for us in the spiritual, heavenly things? How much harder to discipline ourselves against sin, to remain faithful Christians, never falling asleep or giving in to temptation, constantly ready for the day of our death or the day of Christ's return, whichever comes first?

This is the struggle of the Christian life. We want to do rightly, we want to endure and please our God. But sin remains. We do not do the good we want, and the evil we do not want we keep on doing. "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?"

So help us, dear Lord! Preserve us from falling away. For on our own, we are bound to fail. Your judgment day will certainly will catch us off guard, if you do not intervene to help.

But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, for his salvation! There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the Son of God himself came in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, to condemn sin in the flesh by his atoning death.

And thanks be to God, who sends his prophets ahead of time to declare his word, to warn and strengthen us for the day to come.

What a blessing we have in the promise of Malachi, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

What a blessing that God sends forerunners, to turn our hearts back to him.

And so before the first coming of Christ, God sent John the Baptist, the forerunner, the voice crying in the wilderness, confronting the people with their sins. John baptized them in repentance, to make them ready and prepared to meet the coming King. And now, today, our God also sends us forerunners, here in the church, to prepare us for the final Day. Pastors, preaching repentance, warning of the day of judgment, to make us ready.

And like John the Baptist, pastors today are also sent to point you to Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose death takes away the sin of the world. Pastors baptize you into Christ, into his death, to wash away your sins, to make you ready and prepared to meet the coming King.

So this is your task. Live in daily confession and repentance. Keep seeking the absolution of Jesus, preparing each day, praying for faith and strength to stand before the Son of Man.

And for you who fear God's name, who are baptized into his salvation, who desire with your minds to please the Lord, however frail and weak your flesh may be, however often you fail to do the good you want, do not fear. Be comforted. On that day, you will not fall, but stand.

For your salvation does not depend on yourself. The Lord is your salvation, he is your hope, and your strength. Your efforts always fail, but the Sun of Righteousness has risen already for you, to heal you, and clothe you in his righteousness, and hide you in the shadow of his wings.

So for you, Malachi promises redemption. Amid all the warnings of the day of wrath, burning like an oven, destroying all evildoers, Malachi speak of joy, freedom, victory, and salvation. "But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts." And Jesus promises the same, "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

So come, Lord Jesus. Come set us free. Forgive and strengthen and redeem us, and keep us firm in your word, so we may rejoice and lift up our heads on the day when you act. Amen.