

6 December 2017
Advent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“When He Comes Again in Glory”

Text: Luke 21:25-28; Ezekiel 39:21-29; Titus 2:11-14

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The season of Advent really isn't about preparing for Christmas. That's the world's Advent - or, at least, their November and December. Advent in the Church prepares us for Jesus' *second* coming, though Christmas is certainly a part of that. There had to be a first coming so there could be a second coming. There had to be a birth so there could be a death. There had to be a cross so there could be a resurrection - of Jesus and of us. And when Jesus comes again, that is exactly what there will be: resurrection. Of all the dead. Some to everlasting life and some to everlasting death.

And the words that are said during the communion liturgy during the Advent season speak of that. They speak of Jesus' first coming, but *so that* we be ready for His second coming. And so we hear:

It is truly meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, whose way John the Baptist prepared, proclaiming Him the promised Messiah, the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world [first coming stuff], and calling sinners to repentance that they [we] might escape from the wrath to be revealed when He comes again in glory [second coming] (Proper Preface for Advent).

Advent is to prepare us for that coming in glory. That we be ready. That there be no wrath, no death, for us; only joy, only glory, only life.

But the question is, I guess, do we need such preparation? Or is this just another sales pitch, like so many we hear during this season. This one just the Church trying to sell us on something, instead of some store or another.

Well, perhaps the reading from Luke tonight can help us with that question. For those words spoke of what that Last Day will be like - when ***the Son of Man comes with power and great glory***. The terror of that day. ***Distress of nations in perplexity. People fainting with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world.*** Sounds like something we might want to be ready and prepared for!

But here's the line I especially want to draw your attention to, for it is a rather strange

one, it seems to me. When Jesus says: *Now when these things begin to take place, [you] straighten up and raise your heads.*

Really? Back during the Cold War, when the threat of nuclear war was very real, we weren't told to *straighten up and raise your head*, but duck and cover! And in the Midwest, when a tornado is on the way, we're told *to get thee into the storm shelter!* . . . not *straighten up and raise your head*. And when the bullets start to fly, *get down!* not up.

But here, Jesus says, *straighten up and raise your head*. Because that day only brings terror to those who do not know the Son of Man; to those who do not know that One who is *coming in a cloud with power and great glory*. For them, that day is Stranger Danger! That One who is coming, who is He? What does He want? What is He doing? And not knowing, there is fear. Fear of His power and glory.

But that is not us. And that's not how God wants that Last Day to be - one of fear and trembling, of doubt and suspicion. He wants that Day to be a day of joy. Joy for we know the One who is coming and why He is coming and what He wants to do. For He is the One we've known all along. Our brother, our Saviour. The mangled one, the crucified one. The one who came to redeem us and is now coming back to take us home with Him. And thus knowing Him, rejoicing to see Him - like we do friends and relatives we haven't seen for so long at holiday times. We don't fear them, we love them.

Advent helps us get ready for that Day. Just as John the Baptist helped the people of his day prepare for the first coming of Jesus by preaching repentance so they would rejoice in the One who had come to forgive their sins, so too John helps us prepare today - that we repent of our sins and rejoice in the forgiveness we have. The forgiveness we have as Jesus comes to us now to wash away our sins and make us His own. As Jesus comes to us now that we not cling to the things of this world which are passing away, but hold tight to Him and His life which will never pass away. That when He comes, we be not sad at leaving this world, but rejoice at entering the life and new creation He has prepared for us. Our life with Him.

So maybe to put it this way: Advent would capture the excitement we have in waiting for Christmas, so that we wait for the Last Day with that same excitement. For Jesus is. That Day cannot come soon enough for Him. For on that Day He will get what He wants most of all: you. And you will get Him. Revealed, unwrapped, and a joy unlike any other you've ever had.

And who wouldn't *straighten up and raise their heads* for that? Like children on tippy-toes looking for the presents, looking at the lights, looking for the goodies - looking and waiting. Looking and waiting for this day that sometimes seems like it will never come. But it always does. And so will the Last Day. Though it seems so far away and like it will

never come, it will. An ending and a beginning. The ending of one world and the beginning of the next. The ending of one life and the beginning of the next.

So until that day, get ready. Repent. Receive the forgiveness of the one who came for you and is coming again for you. Live the new life you have been given. And when that day finally comes, you will be ready. To celebrate not just the 12 days of Christmas, but the glory of God forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.