

*Sermon for 1 Advent, Year C*  
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*Holy Nativity, Plano*  
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Happy New Year! Today is the first day of the Christian year. And today we enter into a new season: Advent. Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means “coming”. And *adventus* is simply the Latin translation of the Greek word *parousia*. And *parousia* is the word used by theologians to refer to the last great coming of Christ in glory to judge the living and the dead. So you see, there is a logical progression from last week to this week, even though we have begun a new liturgical year. Last week we celebrated the Feast of Christ the King, and this week we begin to prepare for the return of the king.

The *parousia* is an unpopular topic in Episcopal pulpits. We don’t like to think of God in monarchical terms. We rather like our democratic God, all power and authority being subject to our approval. But there is no escaping this scriptural truth. God is king. Christ is king. If he doesn’t reign in our hearts today, he will reign over us, body, mind, and spirit, hereafter. And there will be a reckoning with the king when he returns to his dominion.

The prophet Zechariah, some five centuries before Christ, tells us of the great “day of the Lord”. In Zechariah’s vision, the Lord will initiate his complete rule over the earth by a great earthquake, in which the Mount of Olives overlooking the walls of Jerusalem will be split in half, and great rivers will spring up from Jerusalem, and the whole landscape will be changed. There will be no day and night as we know them. The whole world will be changed by the advent of the Lord God.

Jesus does not lessen the image for us. He simply applies all this to himself. He warns us that there will be great persecution before his coming, and distress at “the roaring of the sea and the waves”, and “the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” And then he quotes the passage from the Daniel, chapter 7, that we read last week: “And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” It is clear that Jesus’ presence with us in his Incarnation does not fulfill *all* of the Old Testament prophecy. There will still be another Advent, when all excuses will be laid bare and all neglect of the truth ended.

The expectation of the second coming is so ingrained in Christian understanding, that St. Paul refers to it in an off-hand way in our epistle reading today. All his hopes and prayers for the Thessalonians are directed to that great day. "... and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you ..." Why? "... so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father ..." When? "... at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

It seems our entire lives are directed to an event that we hardly ever talk about, because it's too scary. Jesus is coming back. And this time, he won't be letting anyone ignore him or persecute him. They may choose to reject him, but that will be another matter entirely, especially for them. If we are Christians, that is followers of Christ, then we will be working toward that great day now, yesterday, because it is the single most important event in the future. In fact, all other events pale in comparison with that one: our petty successes or failures; our holidays and events by which we mark time; even our big transitions, marriage, family, and death. None of that matters in comparison with the expected Advent of the Lord.

So what do we do about it? Do we even think about it? What have you done in the last year to prepare yourself for the return of the king, the return of the one who will judge your entire life? My guess is that, if we are all honest, the answer is "not much." And if that's *your* answer, then you are in grave danger from the consuming flame and the raging storm that accompany the Advent of the Lord who will not keep silent any more. You are in grave danger of being spewn from the mouth of God, because you are neither hot nor cold. You are in grave danger, because there is nothing that attracts God's disapproval and judgment more readily than hypocrisy, double-mindedness, foolish and willful ignorance. If the second coming of our Lord is the most important thing, then we will prepare for it. If it isn't, then we are not true Christians, and the Advent of Christ will be terror and nightmare to us, rather than the fulfillment of our redemption.

So here's another chance. The season of Advent is specifically *for* this. So take advantage of it. In the next almost four weeks, ask yourself whether you are ready to stand face to face with the Lord Jesus at his second coming, and if not, why not. And then pray for his grace to change you accordingly.