

Second Sunday in Advent

From our second lesson today:

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity: the sea and waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Our second lesson presents a fearful prediction for us to ponder. Jesus warns the disciples that when He returns after His resurrection, there will be signs in the heavens, distress of nations, turmoil in nature, great fear, and even heaven itself being troubled.

Our second lesson today, which is the gospel reading for the 2nd Sunday in Advent, gives us a taste of the apocalyptic vision for the second coming of Christ into the world at Judgement. It makes it easier to understand just why the season of Advent is a time to prepare for the celebration of the Nativity of Christ, as well as for the Second Coming.

Each of these two events brings almost incomprehensible changes for the people of God. Each event changes their lives forever, and each is a turning point from which there can be no going back. Jesus' coming to Earth as a human changed the world by fulfilling a promise made ages before, that God would come to save us. Until the coming of Christ, people could only wait for the Messiah to arrive. With His arrival, the people of God were confronted face to face with His mighty power and authority.

With His coming into the world in that tiny little town of Bethlehem, God set into motion the events which would culminate in His death on the cross and His resurrection and the defeat of the powers of death and sin. This birth, obscure by the measure of the world, moved kings and shook empires.

Before His birth, a star was seen in the heavens above that tiny village, leading Kings to the site where the Christ child was born. In the weeks before the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary would have been preparing to travel, then go on a

journey from Nazareth in Galilee down to Bethlehem, a distance of about 60 miles. To put it into perspective.... Roughly from here to Klamath Falls.

Remember that this was a journey made in a time when there were no automobiles, no trains, and no aircraft. It would have been a journey on foot and on the back of a pack animal, if one was available. Further, it would have been a journey undertaken with a young woman who was ready to deliver a child. This circumstance would certainly create many delays while traveling.

The journey would have taken them through the Plain of Jezreel in Galilee, across several rivers, then across the hilly midlands of Samaria, before traveling along the Eastern foothills of Mount Ephraim, passing Jerusalem, and finally to the town of Bethlehem.

Advent is a time of preparation, of getting ourselves ready for the coming of Christ into the world, both in the celebration of His Nativity at Christmas as well as His second coming as final judge of the world. The word Advent comes from the Latin "adventus" which means "coming". We light the advent candles to symbolize the coming of the light of Christ. At His first coming into the world, our Lord was meek, dependent on His human parents for His care, and subject to all the cares of a human. At His second coming, He will return in all power, glory and majesty to judge and rule. Both of these comings require us to prepare ourselves.

We must prepare ourselves to be His servants as we await His coming into the world. To that end we must make a careful, honest and searching inventory of our lives. To root out our own sin and all those qualities and things that make us unworthy to follow Him. As we heard in the Exhortation last week during Holy Communion, we must each week prepare ourselves to be suited to receive the Holy Eucharist. If we find fault, we must be ready and willing to correct these areas that we fall short in or need to improve.

Finally, when we consider the return to Earth of Jesus to serve as judge of all creation, we must prepare for that judgment, readily acknowledging and confessing our sins to God and seeking His forgiveness and mercy.

We do not know when that second coming may occur. We only know that it will occur. Yet, we are given signs for which to watch out for.

"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars."

In the heavens we will see strange things. On earth, there will be “distress of nations, with perplexity.” People will be confused and wonder which way to turn. False leaders may arise and try to lead people away from God and His commandments. Nature itself will seem to be in turmoil, as we see “ the sea and the waves roaring.”

All these things will cause great turmoil and distress as “men’s hearts fail them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” These events will seem very frightening, alarming, and so widespread that they will cause panic among the people. All of the world will seem out of control and in great distress.

The turmoil will extend even to the heavens. He warns, “for the power of heaven shall be shaken.” However, the faithful will not be shaken. The faithful will remember the words of Jesus Christ and hold on tightly to that promise and that assurance.

“And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”

We must be ready. We must look at Advent as a time to prepare. Prepare ourselves and our lives to be worthy and ready. O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

Let us pray....

Come, O Lord , we pray. Be with us now as we prepare for the celebration of Your Nativity, as well as your final return as our judge and savior. Help us to recognize our faults so we can make the necessary changes in our lives. Help us do what we must do to be Your people. This we pray in Your Holy name. AMEN.