

Date Preached	28-Nov-2021	Date Initiated	16-Nov-2021
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Advent 1, Yr C

" that in the last day, when He shall come again in glorious majesty ... ,
we may rise to the life eternal "



Growing up, I was the king of countdowns. If something fun or exciting was on the horizon, I often came up with some way to mark the time until it finally arrived. At the pool we belonged to, I'd try to predict how soon the dreaded 'adult swims' would end by counting how many (painfully slow) laps Mrs So-and-So had swum: When she gets to twelve, I'd tell myself, we can go back in the pool. When Christmas or the end-of-school was approaching, I'd put a big poster on my bedroom door and, every morning, update the number of days until the 'big event.' I even remember, one year, concocting a scheme to count down the number of states we had to drive through on vacation until we *finally* reached beloved Maine: I put two lemon drops for each state in a little bag, and every time we crossed a state line, my sister and I got a new one. (As I recall, our trek through New Hampshire proved shorter than a lemon drop's mouth-life.) And truth be told, this preoccupation with time is still with me: When a vacation's in the offing, I'll often think, while shaving or brushing my teeth, "OK, four weeks from the day after tomorrow, we'll be flying out" or "Let's see, three weeks from now, is Easter."

While this may seem a little obsessive to some—and maybe it is!—I've always rather enjoyed these little rituals, because they seem to bring into the *present* ↓ the future event or the pleasure I'm anticipating. Countdowns move me from a mere EXPECTATION—cool, passive *awareness* that something is coming—to a fuller EXPECTANCY: warm, active, eager *anticipation* of its arrival. Rather than merely waiting for our vacation to start in a few weeks or for someone special to visit next month, EXPECTANCY means that some small aspect of our trip or her visit has already begun for me, *now*: My excitement builds, my imagination engages, and my outlook subtly shifts.

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We most often think of Advent, which begins today, as the season during which we EXPECT Christmas ... when we prepare to celebrate, once again, Our Savior's miraculous entry into this world in human form: God With Us. And, of course, it is.

But the more ancient understanding¹ of Advent is as a *duality*: a season having two complementary comings (or arrivals), rooted in the words we hear the Lord speak through the prophet Jeremiah: "I will fulfill the promise I made" to Israel; I will "execute justice and righteousness." On the one hand, Advent looks to God's fulfillment of these promises in the arrival of the Christ Child.² On the other hand, the fulfillment that takes place in a Bethlehem stable is not God's *final* word. As we heard last week, there is a *not-yet* aspect to the Kingdom of Christ in this

¹ And it is some of the more ancient valents of Christian worship and the liturgical year that the Liturgical Movement—of which our current *Book of Common Prayer* is a product—sought to reclaim for the modern Church.

² And as the season of Advent progresses, this increasingly becomes its primary focus.

world. Earthly evil still rides roughshod over the innocent and the oppressed; hundreds of millions are hungry despite a global agricultural surplus; wars and rumors of wars break out with alarming regularity; and natural and manmade disasters occur too frequently to count.³ This is not God's final design for creation, and, as we hear Jesus say, He will come *again* into this world, to *bring about* that design: The very cosmos will be shaken; human world-order will be disrupted by divine re-creating; and "'the Son of Man'" will come "'in a cloud' with power and great glory."⁴

This is the *other* coming that Advent also EXPECTS: the Apocalypse—literally, the "revealing"; the final revelation of God's eternal plan for creation. Christ's Coming Again will be the end-of-ends, when all humanity will "rise to the life immortal," in the words of our collect. And with apologies to the violent imagery and grace-less exclusionism of the *Left Behind* franchise,⁵ an understanding of the Apocalypse that is grounded in *faith* sees it as an act of God's unbounded mercy and unconditional love; Jesus' final plangent plea for every single person in all history to be baptized by the Holy Spirit and rise, with Him, forever.

Therefore, Jesus says in today's Gospel lesson, we are not to live merely in EXPECTATION of His Coming Again, but in EXPECTANCY of it: not in some passive—or, even, fearful—intellectual awareness that it may happen at any time ... but in an active, engaged embrace of it; an EXPECTANCY that eagerly *longs for* Christ's return ... that pulls into this imperfect present a bit of the 'future perfect': when all divisions between humanity and God ... and also among the various peoples of the earth ... will cease, forever. And Jesus gives us three ways to live in EXPECTANCY of His Coming Again:

- "Be on guard" against "the worries of this life": Look past the strivings and disappointments and afflictions of this present time ... and—as the prospect of a vacation brightens the bleakness of our daily grind—let the glory of Christ's future-return color our *current* living.
- "Be alert at all times": Be vigilant for signs of Christ's final inbreaking into this world, *right now*. Be open to its already having begun.⁶ By eagerly and actively anticipating His Coming Again, we project ourselves ahead in time and propel our spirits into the joyous assurance of "Thy Kingdom come on earth," ↓ at last.
- And, finally, pray "to stand before the Son of Man," for this is glory itself. Envision, in prayer,⁷ being raised to Christ's presence and meeting Him face-to-face, in a holy and eternal union. Foresee, with the confidence of faith, our being transformed into the

³ See Matthew 24:6-8.

⁴ Jesus' language here parallels Daniel 7.

⁵ Popular culture has wrongly—even, in my view, perversely—ginned up a vision of this Second Coming of Christ as some bloodbath ... some great and monstrous plucking of the few 'truly good' souls (perhaps even precisely 144,000 of them!) from among the teeming, unpitied masses of the 'not-good-enough,' who will be left to some literal hell-on-earth. None of that, it seems to me, is consonant with a God Who reveals Godself in a manger or sacrifices Godself on a cross.

⁶ 'Grand reveals' and overwhelming 'special effects' that it would be impossible for us to ignore are the usual stuff of Apocalyptic literature, both ancient and modern. But mightn't the God Who set in motion the protracted process of biological evolution actually choose to reveal Godself, fully and finally, in a more incremental, less obvious manner ... even over a period of decades or perhaps centuries?

⁷ *I.e.*, meditate upon.

Divine. For, in this EXPECTANCY of Christ's glory, we ourselves are changed from one degree of glory into another,⁸ well *before* Christ's Final Return.

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The world has long EXPECTED the Apocalypse ... has debated, literally for millennia, when it will come; what it will entail; and who, precisely, will be saved.⁹ But to live in mere EXPECTATION of the finality of Christ ... to merely anticipate it in passive resignation, or as a matter of dogma or debate ... is to deny the truth of the Word He is and the hope He embodies.

No, Jesus' Advent call upon us is to live in *EXPECTANCY* of His coming in glorious majesty ... of His final and universal call for *all* be counted among the elect of God ... to be saved and live in forever-peace.¹⁰ ¶ That day is too joyous to be relegated solely to the future, but is for us to savor *now*, as well. ¶ That day holds too much promise and hope to be contained only in the TO-BE, but also breaks into the IS-NOW. ¶ That day too gladdens God's heart to be forestalled another instant, but dawns in our beings, even right this very moment. Live in *EXPECTANCY* of Christ's Coming Again—his Second Advent, my friends: Let its tomorrow color your today; seek signs of its future in the very present; and be drawn into His glory. For He is indeed coming ... and is, indeed, already here.



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⁸ See 2 Corinthians 3:18.

⁹ Indeed, this curiosity-*cum*-anxiety is perhaps why, in today's Gospel reading, a crowd forms around Jesus to hear Him talk about such things on the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem.

¹⁰ Although, to be clear, I do believe He gives all the final discretion to decide for themselves: the ability to choose *not* to be saved. Such is gift of free will with which God has endowed humanity.