

Advent 2

I take as my text today from the 21st Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel:

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight O' Lord my Strength and my Redeemer.

As we celebrate the Second Sunday in Advent, I'm sure you have noted that this is a season of both joyful and solemn expectation. Indeed, we lit the candle of ***Joy*** on our ***Advent Wreath*** today.

We joyfully wait for ***Christmas Day*** to celebrate, as we do each year, the arrival of our Lord and Saviour, born into the world, taking upon himself our flesh, our humanity.

What a joyful expectation, and centuries have not dulled the beauty of that night in Bethlehem, when even the angels could not be contained as they heralded the birth of God's Son. Such an event — filled with love, joy, and hope for all of mankind, for all of creation.

Yet, as we wait with joyful expectation, we are reminded of the words of our Lord, when he said that he would come again. He would come again to complete the redemption that began with his ***First Coming***.

See, beloved, we are living through a process, often described as a journey, that is not yet complete, the end result being our final judgment and the determination of how we will spend eternity.

Much has been written about the ***Second Coming***, often referred to as the ***End Times***, what it will be like, when will it be. There has been so much speculation about the ***Second Coming***, that there have been attempts to give dates, precise dates and times as to when it will occur.

And, speculation it is, even audacity for a creature of God to try to predict the ***Mind of God***.

In truth, it is not ours to know the time — and the perceptions of what it will be like, drawn from various interpretations and misinterpretations of ***Scripture***, can hardly approach the reality that awaits us.

If we could say anything, it would be that history is not without an end, and, as Christians, we know that it has a direction, a goal, and that goal, that end, is Jesus Christ, who will establish his Kingdom at the last.

Today's Gospel reading from St. Luke gives us an image of the final times, though when our Lord was speaking, the destruction he was predicting was most certainly the fall of Jerusalem that would come about in the year 70. Still, the imagery is quite appropriate for the *End Times*, more properly the *Second Coming*.

Our imagery of the *Second Coming* comes predominantly from Revelation where St. John has most vividly depicted those *End Times*, imagery that sticks in our mind's eye.

Similar imagery may be found in the prophets, predicting the destruction of Jerusalem that occurred twice before. As in the words of the prophet Joel:

And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

And then compare those words from Joel with those of our Lord as recorded by Luke:

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 the 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.

Very powerful words from our Lord. He sets a very frightful state that the people would be in, using language understandable in that day, the frightful sights in the heavens or sky above, and the terrible storms and tempests, all leading to a state of confusion and perplexity.

In the Syriac text, we see a wringing of hands, as done by someone in agony and great distress.

The roaring of the waves can be taken as a metaphor for the waves of Roman soldiers crossing the land, as they approach the city of Jerusalem.

Historically, we may note that Jerusalem was encompassed by the troops of Cesti's Gallus in the year 66; again, by those of Vespasian in 68; and finally, by those of Titus in 70.

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

Here, we have, in the words of Jesus, a description of his *Coming* again, and, though most associated with his *Second Coming*, those words have also been applied to the destruction of Jerusalem.

For some, the destruction of Jerusalem was evidence of Christ coming to destroy Jerusalem, fulfilling these predictions; yet they provide evidence of his *Second Coming* in the glory of his Person as the *Messiah*, the *Redeemer*, the *Final Judge*.

Focusing first on the fall of Jerusalem, we are presented with its inevitability. The *People of Promise*, prepared over centuries for that moment in history when the *Messiah* would enter the world, had rejected him. They had turned their backs to God and set in motion their own destruction.

Christ's religion could not prevail unless there was a radical change. That change came when the temple was destroyed, and the Levitical priesthood was abolished. That, in essence, occurred in the year 66 in fulfillment of the *abomination of desolation* spoken of by our Lord.

That is when the *Zealots* took over the temple, turning it into an armed camp, defiling it with blood, and making an image of their own high priest. The daily sacrifices ceased.

That was followed within a few years by the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem to make way for the heavenly Jerusalem.

Yet, the words of our Lord go beyond just the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70, to reflect His *Second Coming* as well.

Contextual debate has been inevitable, as we might expect among Biblical scholars, often centering around the dating of St. Luke's Gospel, whether it was written about the year 61, or after 70, or as late as the year 80.

However, if Acts was written in 62, as many scholars believe, so the Gospel was most likely written a year earlier. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Gospel was written to brief *Theophilus*, a Roman official and member of the court that was to hear Paul's trial before Nero in Rome.

Yet, difficult as it may be for us to comprehend the full meaning of the passage from Luke's Gospel, there is a clear warning of what is to come when history comes to its end, when history reaches its goal. Our Lord will return in glory and majesty to render judgment, and to receive into his Kingdom those who have endured in the faith and given themselves to His service.

Jesus further warns the Apostles concerning the reading of the signs. Certainly, it is easy enough to read the signs of the seasons. These are earthly signs. But heavenly signs are different, and not so easily discerned. Thus, we should watch so as not to be easily led astray by false prophets, especially during times of war and conflagrations.

Now, in this time, *today*, as we wait in joyful expectation for the annual celebration of Christ's *First Coming* into the world, how can we also look forward to the *Second Coming* with any sense of joy, having heard the dreadful warnings from our Lord himself?

That is part of the miracle of **Christ's Birth**, and the wonder of **God's Love**.

Jesus Christ, having become one of us, defeated Satan, and laid waste to Satan's empire of sin. Though he died on the *Cross* for our salvation, he rose up again bodily from the grave, that we may also rise up clothed in a spiritual body to be with him in his **Heavenly Kingdom**.

Regardless of the calamities that may come, or the terrors that may await the world, Christians who have accepted **God's Love** and **Grace**, and have lived accordingly, have nothing to fear. Those Christians have filled their hearts and minds with love, kindness, patience, and understanding, ever mindful of the two great commandments: to love God with heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as our self.

Thus, the beauty and awe of Christ's *First Coming* will be exceeded only by the Glory and Majesty of his *Second Coming*.

At that time, all will be fulfilled in Christ. His Kingdom will truly come. Our salvation will be fully realized, and we will be united in love with him for all eternity.