

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent: December 9, 2018**

**“Watch Out! Look Up!”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is the Gospel Lesson, Luke 21, especially these words, “**Luke 21:25-28.**”

As Christmas continues to draw near, we continue our preparations. Last week, our text connected Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Today, our text ties Bethlehem to the Last Day. One of the things that makes our preparations bearable, is having an end in sight. For example, band students prepare specific pieces for a specific concert date. Without the goal, the steps make little to no sense. So we prepare for Christmas through the steps of Advent, and our Gospel text today sets perfectly in Advent; not only are we preparing to celebrate Christmas, we are preparing for the second coming of Christ, the Last Day.

This text gives much anxiety to the sinful nature. To hear of the power of the heavens being shaken, the sun, the moon, and the stars causing distress among the nations, can be unnerving. For the world, it is scary; but, for the Christian, this is a great day. While most of life for the Christian is like winter in Iowa, suffering, head tucked down, bowing under the weight of darkness, on the Last Day, the Sun of Righteousness dawns and Christians stretch up like cats yearning for the warmth of the sun.

Luther writes on this text with great wisdom, “*The first thing for us to understand is that although the signs preceding the judgment day are many and great, they will all be fulfilled, even though none or very few men take note of or esteem them as such. For two things must take place according to the Word and prophecy of Christ and the apostles: first, that many and great signs will be made manifest; and secondly, that the last day will come unawares, the world not expecting it, even though that day be at the door.*” What a great comfort to know that there is a timeline, God is in charge of it, and all things will be fulfilled according to His Word, at His time and command.

Some care has to be given here, and there has been many interpretations of these texts. There are things that we can say, and many more questions that may arise. As God’s children, we must be careful to not go beyond His Word.

We must not search the hidden knowledge of God. There are things, by God's Wisdom, we are not privileged to know, for our own benefit. If we are to draw comfort from these words, we must bear in mind, ***"No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."***<sup>1</sup> In other words, to hear these words of Christ, the whole of Scripture must be called to mind.

Jesus says there will be signs given in the sun, the moon, and the stars. One must also recall the promise made in Genesis 8. Noah has just come off the Ark and the Lord says, ***"I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."***<sup>2</sup>

Throughout history, changes in the sun have been looked upon as foreboding and ominous. There have been many post-apocalyptic stories surrounding the question of how man will survive in a world with no sun, or a changed sun. I recently heard again this week an interview on NPR where the man discussed the sun imploding, burning out, and how that would change our planet. The eclipse last year, caused all sorts of news, and wild cultish activities.

The words of Jesus from our text is not the first time God has spoken these realities to His people. Recall Psalm 102, ***"Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end. The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their offspring shall be established before you."***<sup>3</sup>

Jesus has previously told the disciples, ***"To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven... 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they***

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 1:20-21

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 8:21-22

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 102:25-28

***have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.’***<sup>4</sup>

The truths are hidden in plain sight. God has given the knowledge of salvation, and by faith, you can stand up and lift your heads. Luke 21 paints a picture of God’s orderly creation becoming unstable, increasing in chaos. It seems as though God’s goodwill toward the original work of His hands, which He looked upon and declared, “It is good,” now suffers an increase of anger, as God’s patience runs out with corrupt and perverse humanity. While creation seems to come apart at the seams, it is met with mixed reactions.

The world goes on as though these are natural things of the world. Because the world sees its end, apart from the eternal goodness of God, it acts as these things are simply due to an upset delicate ecosystem bullied on by the human footprint. Because, according to the world, there is no gracious God, the world is a resource for its own end. People and creatures alike are equal in stature to claim the resources on the earth. What this leads to is a teaching of man being a simple end unto themselves.

What is worse is when a false theology, or a generic god, gets tossed into the mix. In efforts to calm the anxiety of the nations, and the rising perplexity of the chaos, an appeal is made to a mere subjective god who exists to make me feel better. Whatever the problem you face, or the state of bewilderment you find yourself, the world’s idea of a god is to simply pull the magic god charm out of your pocket, and drive back the evil. For many, God is not confessed as a merciful Father. He is simply a good luck charm, and if anything bad happens at all, well then, He must not really exist.

A great teaching on this text was written by Latantius Firmianus in 320 A.D. Listen to what he writes, *“When the end of the world draws near, the condition of human affairs must materially change and take on a more wicked form. Then will malice and wickedness prevail to such a degree that our age, in which malice and wickedness have almost reached their highest pitch, will be looked upon as happy and treasured as golden in comparison with that time when no one will be able to*

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 13:11, 14-16

*help or give advice. Then will righteousness become practically unknown, and blasphemy, covetousness, impure desires, and unchastity become common. Then will the godly become a prey to the most wicked and be vexed and grieved by them. At the same time only the wicked will be rich and well to do, while the godly will be driven hither and thither in shame and poverty. Justice will be perverted, law will be overthrown, and no one will have aught else but that which he can secure by his own strength. Daring and strength will possess all. There will be neither faith nor confidence left in man, neither peace, nor loveliness, nor shame, nor truth, and as a result, no safety, no government, no rest of any kind from the reprobate. For all lands will become rebellious, everywhere men will rage and war with one another, the whole world will be in arms, and bring destruction to itself.”<sup>5</sup>*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what I am about to tell is really important. If you have fallen asleep, now is the time to come back in and pay attention. The signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars will be the same for all people. The cataclysmic events in the end times will be alarming for all. The difference is this: those who are not hearers of the Word will have anguish, anxiety, fear and fainting. Those who hear the Word of God keep it are blessed. The signs, although shocking, will be cause for faith to straighten up and raise its head. These are signs that the Son of Man returns in the cloud with power and great glory.

While the first advent of Christ was on a silent night, the Second Advent will be of a different character. Where the first advent was proclaimed by the angels and spread by the shepherds, the Second Advent will be known by all at the same time, ***“For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”***<sup>6</sup>

You might ask, “Who could lift up his head and straighten up in the face of such terrible wrath and judgment and foreboding?” Hear the word of Christ, ***“When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads; because your redemption is drawing near.”***<sup>7</sup>

Jesus does not say, “Be filled with fear and drop your head.” No, this is the time your freedom from sin, death, and hell is realized. It is for this time we pray

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<sup>5</sup> Sermons by Martin Luther, Vol. 1, pg. 71-72

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 24:27

<sup>7</sup> Luke 21:28

earnestly in Thy Kingdom Come and Deliver Us From Evil. The Last Day is one that for the believer is comforting and sweet. This is a great day of confidence.

***“‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.’ And again Isaiah says, ‘The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.’ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”***<sup>8</sup>

So, you Christian, now you live in hope by faith. We are blessed to live in the now, not yet. We live in a time of sinful nature and death looming, and what we will be is not yet fully realized. We are now forgiven and washed in the blood of lamb, the time for no more trial and tribulation is yet to come.

As we live through this time of now, in the midst of sin and death, your Lord breaks forth. What a great blessing He has given to His Church. Consider this, ***“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”***<sup>9</sup>

The gathering around God’s Word and God’s Sacraments gives great confidence. As the Church gathers around His gifts, redemption is given. In humble means, the Lord of Glory comes with His grace. Through these gifts, He brings the Kingdom of Heaven to forgive, uplift, restore, and strengthen. Along with this gift of life, He gives you brothers and sisters in the faith. Together, we bear witness to His death and resurrection, as we bear one another’s burdens in love.

Here, like the children of Israel, we live in the context of fiery serpents. As they slither and bite, we look to the cross for salvation. Here we are driven by the Gospel to point others to the same, the only place freedom from death is given.

There is going to be an end. Our last day may come before The Last Day, but have no fear. You know the one who controls the timeline. You know the end, and what

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<sup>8</sup> Romans 15:11-13

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 12:1-2

it brings. You know this is the time for eternal life. You know this because while the world outside is frightful and searches for goodwill in chestnuts roasting on an open-fire, your sin has been paid for by the Son of God. Your death has been swallowed up forever. Your God gives you Himself.

While the world will not be prepared, you are. You have been washed, fed, and strengthened. Give no fear to what is not given for you to know, take heart in what you know. Take confidence in the gifts of Baptism. Have joy in the everlasting proclamation of His Word. Rejoice in the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.

Let us pray,

“O Jesus Christ, do not delay,  
But hasten our salvation;  
We often tremble on our way  
In fear and tribulation.  
O hear and grant our fervent plea:  
Come, mighty judge, and set us free  
From death and ev’ry evil.” Amen.<sup>10</sup>

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**Prayer of the Church  
Second Sunday in Advent  
9 December 2018**

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<sup>10</sup> The Day Is Surely Drawing Near LSB 508:7

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. O Lord God, heavenly Father, give ear to our cries for mercy. Create in us contrite hearts, and work in us true repentance and faith. Keep us, Your baptized children, clothed in the perfect holiness and righteousness of Your Son, that we may remain His beautiful and unblemished Bride. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We praise You for retaining among us Your Holy Word and Sacraments. Continue to raise up faithful stewards of Your mysteries, that repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Christ's name would be proclaimed in our midst and throughout all the world. Prepare all Your baptized children to be faithful confessors of the hope that is in them. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Fill us, Your children, with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may abound in hope. Remove from us all grumbling and coveting, that we would be faithful in our vocations and glad in our daily work. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In the midst of strife and conflict, and wars and rumors of wars, remind us that You have given all authority in heaven and earth to Your Son, our ascended Lord. Call to faithfulness the leaders of the earth, and bless those who govern. Thwart those who would hinder Your reign among all peoples, that peace may be established in all places. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Many in our midst have been afflicted with pain, sickness, trials and difficulties. Be merciful to those who are suffering, [*especially those who have requested our prayers, including \_\_\_\_\_*], that they may be granted health or strength to endure their afflictions. Help us all to see that when Christ returns in glory, He will make all things new, and that even our bodies will be incorruptible and immortal. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, our times are in Your hands. Look with favor, we pray, on Your servants **Marrina, Ben, & Randy** whom You have granted another year of earthly life. Grant that *they* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *their* trust in Your goodness all the days of *their* life; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

You have taught us to straighten up and raise our heads when we see the coming of the Son of Man. Even now, Your Son comes to us under the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar. Grant that all who commune today may receive the very body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of all their sins and to their abundant blessing. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Receive our thanks for the saints who have gone before us and now enjoy heavenly bliss. As we wait with them for the coming of Your Son on the Last Day, enable us to endure in the faith through the encouragement of the Scriptures, that we would be welcomed with them into the new heavens and new earth to come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**