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Those who often and mistakenly accuse us Anglicans for being unbiblical in our manner of worship would do well to attend this morning's Mass. They might be surprised to find that we honor Scripture so much that we have dedicated this Second Sunday in Advent to the importance and reverence of the Holy Scriptures. Though it should be said that every Sunday, every Mass and even every Morning and Evening Prayer Office we celebrate, elevates, and respects the Bible. This is because the Mass, Morning and Evening Prayer, and even the many collects appointed for the Sunday are composed literally from the Scriptures. The Book of Common Prayer, the Missal, the Office Books are like great tapestries woven throughout with the golden threads of the Holy Scriptures. This is the Church's gift to us, and our gift to the Church. If you want as close a relationship with Christ that you can get this side of heaven, if you desire to live out the Scriptures, then you have no further to look than the Mass. For here as it was written in the Word of God, does God's Word, Jesus Christ, come and dwell within us through forms of bread and wine. This hints at the great mystery that our tradition centers on, that the phrase, the Word of God, does not just mean that God is only the speaker of words on a page, that written record of the Word which comprises a moral standard we are expected to live up to, but He is the Incarnate Word, the Word which *became flesh and dwelled among us*.

It is for the celebration for this birth of that Word that we prepare ourselves in this Advent. Preparing ourselves spiritually to receive Christ this Christmas means that this is not just the empty memorial of an event in the life of Christ. If Christmas was just a memorial, we might expect the lessons and the tradition to simply encourage us to pay attention. But our lessons go a bit further than asking us to just do our best to pay attention. This coming Feast Day has been deemed so important that we are given four weeks to prepare ourselves, and a week or more to celebrate. Often people will take on a discipline this Advent to help them better prepare spiritually. A popular discipline is to spend less time on social media, to cut out sweets, or to take on something: like praying Morning or Evening Prayer daily, or praying the rosary daily, or making the Christmas Novena. In many ways this season is treated a little bit like Lent. But like Lent and Easter, again, we are not trying to prepare ourselves for Christmas as a mere remembrance or memorial of a past event.

What happens at Mass on Christmas and Easter is similar to what we believe happens at every Mass. We do not believe that when we receive Holy Communion it is only a symbol or memorial. We believe that when we receive Holy Communion at Mass, we receive Christ into ourselves physically and spiritually. We believe and teach that when we attend Mass we are standing at the foot of the Cross, uniting our prayers to Christ and Christ crucified. When we attend Mass and receive Holy Communion, we, as Fr. Austin Farrer writes, *touch the slain and risen Christ*. The same is true for Christmas, when we attend Mass on Christmas Day, it is as if we have spiritually joined with the shepherds and angels who knelt and adored the newborn Christ that first Christmas. For it is the record of Holy Scripture, that Christ says, *this is My Body*, and *this is My Blood*, and we take the record of Scripture and the Words of Christ at face value.

We may also assume that this Sunday's focus on the gift of the Scriptures is where the familiar theme of hope and the old theme of judgment find their origin. John Henry Newman points out that this is inherent in the history of Biblical Israel, he writes, *Before Christ came, the faithful remnant of Israel was consoled with the promise that "their eyes should see" Him, who was to be their "salvation." "Unto you that fear My Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings." Yet it is observable that the prophecy, though cheering and encouraging, had with it something of an awful character too. First, it was said, "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His Temple, even the messenger of the Covenant whom ye delight in." Yet it is soon added, "But who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap."* And so, it is fitting that Advent focuses on this dichotomy of hope and fear this time of year. We hope our Christmas will be filled with joy and peace, but first, we submit to Advent with its four weeks of warning. We also must not forget that this is the nature of the Scriptures. In the same book, in the same chapter and the same verse, we get both that which should inspire in us hope and that which might strike fear or conviction in our hearts. In the same Scriptures we encounter the hope of redemption, of salvation, and God's glory, and the fear of judgment, of coming face to face with Christ Jesus. In this morning's lessons we are presented with a beautiful passage from Isaiah, encouraging the people of Israel to put all their hope in God. In the Epistle we see that this hope is opened to everyone and anyone, including Gentiles, who place their faith and hope in Jesus Christ, who is the Root of Jesse. Then we are shocked by the

stern warning from Jesus Christ that will take place at the end of all things. But that which will cause us to fear are *signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; upon the earth distress of nations...the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear...the powers of heaven shall be shaken*. But Jesus does not tell us this to make us afraid, but to give us hope, for Christ Himself says, *they shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.... when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh*. Bad news, wars and rumors of war, natural disaster should not strike fear into our hearts about the end of the world but should encourage us that the consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven with the return of Jesus Christ is closer than we formally thought.

It seems strange to us that our lessons this Sunday in Advent focus on both hope and fear. Today, we are given both the encouragement to place our hope in Jesus Christ Who Himself is the Word and Wisdom of God, and in His Words which will never pass away, and we are warned that it is by that Word that our fitness for the Kingdom of Heaven will be judged. And yet it is the great mercy and gift of God that we have been given the Holy Scriptures, and in our own language, in multiple editions, for almost every reading level. On some level, all we must do, is to *take and read* as St. Augustine did so many years ago in his garden when he picked up the Scriptures, and His life was forever changed. If you want to experience true joy and peace this Christmas, if you want a fulfilling Christmas, I invite you to unite yourself to the Mass. Kneel with us in adoration and worship of the infant Christ who will be made present to us on this altar. Receive Him into your hearts, step into the very words of the Scriptures, and you will find here hope, peace, love, and joy like you have never known. Amen.