

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The First Sunday in Advent¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the twenty-eighth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

“Therefore thus saith [SETH] the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.

“And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report. For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it. For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim [PURR-uh-zim], he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the twenty-first Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“When they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage [**BETH-fuh-dgee**], unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

“And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name 'of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”*⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

We are come to the first Sunday in Advent. Advent is from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming”. That is appropriate, as we now enter that season of the Church year in which we await the coming of the Christ child into the world in His humanity at Christmas.

During Advent, we wait expectantly for the coming of our Lord. As we wait, we must prepare ourselves for His arrival. Advent is also, then, a time of introspection and a time to make necessary changes in our mode of living so as to be appropriate servants for our Lord.

We await the coming of Jesus Christ in two senses. We look forward to taking part in the celebration of the Lord’s coming to live as one of us as human, and for His second coming as Judge of the world and Redeemer.

These twin preparations for the arrival of the Lord are referred to again and again in the ancient plainsong hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”⁷. Each verse calls on the Lord to prepare, sustain and save Israel and her people as they wait on the coming of Messiah. Each verse outlines a trouble Israel faces, and calls on the Lord to be the salvation, the relief, of error. From the opening verse:

*“O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.”*

Until the concluding verse,

*“O come, Desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind;
bid thou our sad divisions cease,
and be thyself our King of Peace.”*

Each verse calls on the Most High to help Israel, ending her captivity, her isolation, her internal strife, her temptation and warfare with Satan and the powers of death. Each verse is followed by the hopeful and triumphant refrain:

*“Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.”*

This tradition is passed down to us today, and Advent still serves for us as a time to prepare for the coming of Messiah in the form of a God-child who will save us, as well as for His Second Coming in which we and all the world will be judged.

In today’s Collect, we are called upon to consider not only that Jesus Christ *“came to visit us in great humility,”* but also that *“in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal.”*⁸ The readings throughout the Advent season are selected to emphasize these two comings of God to the world, and the preparation we must make to be ready for each of those comings.

Today’s Epistle for Holy Communion recites again those things which God has commanded us to do to be suitable and worthy to serve Him. To that end St. Paul re-states the Ten Commandments. St. Paul notes, *“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”*⁹ Clearly, he refers to the time when our Lord will return to Earth the second time to judge, and that in order to be ready for that judgment, it is necessary that people *“awake out of sleep”* and be actively and consciously preparing themselves for the times to come.

Part of that preparation is to draw the distinction between the things of Earth and the things of God. We are instructed to hold fast to the things of God, which truly matter in the long run, and to forsake the things of Earth, which do not really matter.

In our Second Lesson, which is also today's Gospel at Holy Communion, we find Jesus entering Jerusalem for the last time. This was His final coming to the great city to face down the leaders of Israel and to begin the last and greatest part of His mission on Earth.

The crowds who witnessed His entry into the city cried out deliriously for what they were convinced was a military leader. They were doomed to be disappointed, for Jesus had no intention of forming an Earthly government. His battles were of a spiritual nature, and would lay instead the foundation for the return of His people to the Kingdom of Heaven.

As the crowds yelled out, "*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest,*"¹⁰ they did not understand how right they truly were. Jesus was indeed blessed, but not in the way that the crowd imagined. He cared not for the things of Earth, which do not matter, but only for the things of God.

So let us now together enter the season of Advent. Let us prepare for the coming of the Lord, both as infant Savior over two thousand years ago, and as triumphant Savior at a time we cannot know.

As we await His coming, let us each prepare ourselves for His coming. To that end, let us prepare to worthily celebrate those events in the tiny town of Bethlehem, in which our Lord and Savior would enter His earthly life as a human child born to a virgin mother. Born in meager surroundings, He was—and is—still God.

Let us also prepare ourselves and our souls for His final coming as Judge of the world and all creation. Finally, let us prepare ourselves for our lives each and every week, to worthily receive Him in the Holy Eucharist through grace. Then we can join with all God's Saints throughout history who sang this hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we now enter Advent, in which we prepare ourselves for Your coming, both as infant King and as final Judge. Give us the insight, the wisdom, the courage and the honesty to examine ourselves and our lives, to make changes as needed, and to be ready to fashion our lives so as to be Your people throughout time. This we ask in Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.



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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle and Gospel for Holy Communion on the First Sunday in Advent, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 28:14-22 (KJV).

⁴ "Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer." *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. Matthew 21:1-13 (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 21: 9-11 (NIV).

⁷ THE HYMNAL 1940, Hymn 2 (PECUSA 1940).

⁸ *The Collect for the First Sunday in Advent*, The Book Of Common Prayer 90 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁹ Romans 13:11 (NIV).

¹⁰ St. Matthew 21:9 (NIV).

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