

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved,

In Advent, we meditate on the theme of the coming of Christ.

Last week, we meditated on His coming in gracious humility as He came to Jerusalem on a donkey
in order to die on the cross for our sins

& He came to us in His Word of grace and forgiveness to unite us to Himself.

This week, we meditate on His coming in glorious power on the clouds

in order to judge the living and the dead

& He comes to us in His Word of grace and forgiveness (and Sacrament) to prepare us for that awe-full day.

These comings of Christ are visible and they come with signs so that people may be prepared.

2,500 years ago, Zechariah spoke of the sign of the King riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt.

2,000 years ago, Jesus instituted the visible signs of His faithful Church: Baptism,

the preaching of the Gospel in the forgiveness of sins, and the Lord's Supper.

And, as in our text, He also gave us signs for His final coming.

All so that we may be prepared, not passing our time in complacency or fear.

So let us hear these gracious Words of our Lord with **ears to hear and good and honest hearts.** Luke 8:15

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity.... Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

..."Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near.... Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life.... But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Strolling through a sporting goods store recently, I happened to pass by the ammunition aisle.

It was just a little bit less bare than the toilet paper aisle in March.

And I hear on the news that gun sales have been making and breaking records this year.

It appears that people, like with toilet paper, have started to stock pile guns and ammunition.

I suppose one could take this as a sign. People are preparing. For what exactly?

My guess is they don't exactly know. But they want to be prepared.

My guess is also that most, if not all, those preparing to defend themselves are doing this out of fear.

To them, the future seems uncertain. They fear for their safety and the safety of their communities.

And so they're taking steps that they consider will help to protect their lives

and the lives of others in case "something" happens.

Do you suppose that this fits into Jesus' signs about the end times from Matthew 24[:6]:

"And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars.

See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet."

But notice that Jesus doesn't prepare us for His final coming by motivating us to fear. Instead, He tells His people that they will **straighten up and raise their heads, for their redemption draws near.**

And He likens these tumultuous signs,
not to when fall and winter come and things are dying,
but to when spring and summer come and things are coming to life.

But don't get me wrong, there will be fear!

He says there will be **distress of nations in perplexity** and **people fainting with fear and with foreboding**, or fearful expectation.

And the signs themselves would certainly cause fear, **the roaring of the sea and the waves and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.**

But consider who Jesus says will be full of fear. "**They**," He says.

"**They**" are not His faithful people, His Church, who know the signs and are prepared.

"**They**" are those of "**this generation**", those who do not *drown their old Adam with all its sin & evil lusts, by daily contrition and repentance* but instead live in carnal security.

For them, what will cause them fear will not only be the destruction of this present heavens and earth passing away in fire behind them (you know, all that they have ever known and trusted in), but all their sins will be exposed convicting them on their right, and the devil accusing them on the left, and Jesus Christ, the righteous Judge of all the earth, sitting on His glorious throne before them. And they will not have an answer to their Judge for all their sins, since they do not have and would not take, His blood and righteousness to cover over them.

But Jesus also warns His people **watch yourselves and stay awake at all times, lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life...**

What Jesus is warning us about here is that we can still lose our faith in this time of grace.

He does not know of any such teaching as "once saved, always saved," which drives one, either to constant fear and uncertainty, wondering if they are indeed saved, or to carnal security, thinking that they are free to live however they please because they are saved.

Notice also that Jesus doesn't say here that the devil is able to separate you from the love of God. But He does say that YOU are able to separate you from the love of God.

"**Watch yourself...**" He says. Be on your guard.

And then He shows us how this happens: **with dissipation, drunkenness and the cares of this life.**

"Dissipation" is not a word that we use commonly, but in an economically rich society like ours, it should certainly be in our Christian vocabulary because it represents a danger to our faith.

Dissipation means wasteful expenditure, or squandering, like the parable of the prodigal son.

Of course, wasteful doesn't simply mean that we purchased something for way too much when we could have gotten it cheaper somewhere else.

As managers of all God's gifts, wasteful means not using His resources for His purposes.

To be clear, this does not mean that you cannot use His resources for your enjoyment; the Lord gave us the fruits and bounty of the earth to enjoy,

but it does mean that our enjoyment is not our main goal in this life,
nor the main purpose for which He gives us our management and vocations.

So how might one examine his life to see if **dissipation, drunkenness and the cares of this life** may be crowding out our spiritual life?

Follow the money? Examine your budget.

Do you spend more on various forms of entertainment or on guns and ammunition per year than you do supporting the Word of God that sustains and grows your faith?

That might be a sign that you are seeking first your enjoyments, rather than the kingdom of God.

Examine your time.

Do you find you devote more time to the range or to politics than you do in meditation and prayer?

Can you scroll Facebook for hours or spend 20 minutes trying to find something worth watching, but find it difficult to spend a few minutes with your face in The Book of Life, watching and preparing for Your Lord's return?

That might be a sign that you're letting down your guard rather than being **sober-minded and alert**.

Examine your general well-being.

Do you find yourself succumbing to the fear-mongering of news outlets and social media drama instead of praying to Your God (the almighty, omniscient and merciful God one

Who rules over heaven and earth for your good) and trusting in Him to do what is best?

That may be a sign that your cares for this life are overwhelming your care for the life to come.

If this is the way we live our day-to-day lives, then we would expect Christ's return to be dreadful.

But, dear fellow redeemed, we are not preparing for something that may or may not happen, as those building up stockpiles of guns and ammo are. We know it will.

You know Christ will return to judge the living and the dead, at least you confess it each week.

And you have seen the signs of its coming.

You have heard of wars and rumors of wars, perhaps you are even getting ready.

The love of many is growing cold, perhaps even your own has, as you look heartlessly on those caught in their own drunkenness and carousing.

You've seen/heard false prophets speaking things God never said, condoning sins, denying Christ.

So how are you to be prepared?

The same way that God's people prepared for His first coming: Being united to Him in His Word.

Isaiah told of Him coming through a virgin. And that's how He came.

Zechariah told of His coming on a donkey. And that's how He came.

Moses and John the Baptist spoke of Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And that's why He came: to take away, not only the sins of the world, but your sins;

To wisely spend God's gifts to Him of a righteous life, lived in flesh and blood to be completely... lavishly ... generously ... abundantly spent for you and your salvation.

It was not wasteful, to spend the infinite life of God on the redemption of your soul because that was the exact thing for which God gave it to Jesus.

...so much was He watching out for you to prepare you for Christ's coming in glory to bring you into His eternal dwellings.

If the Lord kept His Word by His OT prophets, mere men, then

How much more, when Jesus Himself tells you that He comes to you today in Water and His Word,
in Holy Baptism to wash you in His blood and make you holy in His sight?
How much more then, when Jesus tells you that He comes to you today through His ministers
to declare you righteous and clean?
How much more then, when He says that He unites Himself, His body and blood,
His soul and His divine nature to you through simple bread and wine,
to nourish and strengthen you to stand before Him at His final coming?

And as a bonus, if you are so ready for Christ to come, then you are ready to die at any time in any way.
If you are yet fearful of death, or of these things to come upon the earth,
then pray to your gracious Lord for strength to stand before Him, head lifted up in peace and joy.

If all things are going passing away, as He has told us they surely will,
then cling to and spend God's gifts to you on the one thing that doesn't pass away: His Word.

Notice, that Jesus doesn't motivate you to prepare for His return by fear, but by love and hope.
We close then with these words from the Holy Spirit through St. Peter, who also encourages you:
Through His Word, God **has given us His very great and precious promises...**

**For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness;
and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance;
and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love....
Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned,
be on your guard so that you may not be carried away ... from your secure position.
But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.** 2Peter1:4-7, 17-18

Soli Deo Gloria