

## Sermon for Advent 1 2020

*"<sup>26</sup> Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." Mark 13.26-27.*

The season of Advent is a time of waiting and of anticipation. We wait for the celebration of the birth of Christ at Christmas, and we wait for the second coming of Christ at the end of time. Patience, and watching, and waiting. This is Advent.

We gain some understanding of this divided attention when we look to this morning's gospel reading. By divided I mean the twin focus of Christmas in about a month's time, and the glory of the second coming; we know not when. In the gospel this morning the people face a similar difficulty. As they listen to Jesus, they also have two matters to take their attention.

When Jesus speaks of suffering, and earlier on, the collapse of the temple, the people are challenged to think of the temple and its destruction, or the signs of the end of time with the climax of the Christ coming in glory. We can recognise the essence of Good Friday in verse 24:

*"the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light,  
<sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken."*

It is like a foretelling of the crucifixion of Jesus, and yet it is a reference to the glorious second coming of the Christ. When Jesus died on the cross the earth was plunged into darkness, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, the earth shook, and the stones were split.

The people to whom Jesus spoke were told of the forthcoming destruction of the temple, for Jesus stated that not one stone would be left standing on another. The temple was in fact destroyed in 70 AD. The people were forced to look forward to the end of time and the destruction and suffering that was to come. They were then encouraged by the promise of the return of Christ. It must have been very confusing for them.

For us we have the tension between the very humble birth of Jesus. There is no grandeur being born in a barn, or a cave, surrounded by farm animals. For Joseph and Mary there is the joy of childbirth, but no spectacular arrival apart from that.

We contrast this with the anticipated second coming of the Christ in Glory. He will come in the clouds with great power and glory. There will be no notable humility in that arrival. We are told that he will come as our judge. We are familiar with the parables that are to guide us in this life: The sheep divided from the goats, the virgins awaiting the Bridegroom, some prepared with spare oil and others not prepared. A sermon for another time is how we in fact judge ourselves by how we choose to live.

Jesus states that the coming of the Son of Man will be as predictable as the seasonal changes in the fig tree. We see the changes in the fig tree, the beginning of obvious life with the springing forth of small buds and leaves. We see this and we know that the fruit will be produced at the right time.

Jesus promises that when we see the signs of the end of time, we can anticipate the joyful fruit of our life of faith. What are the signs? Various they are listed as earthquake, fire, storm, wars, things of force and destruction. We see these things around us in this age, in the same way that our parents and grandparents and ancestors before them have seen them.

These are reminders to be ready, to be prepared, for when Jesus Comes in his glory. We are told quite plainly that we will never know the time or the day. There is no way we can anticipate the day of the second coming. There is no point saying to ourselves that we have plenty of time, or that we will be warned at the last moment. The time for preparation for the glorious second coming of Christ is now. It has always been now. Every generation will have been instructed to prepare for the coming of Christ, now.

As we approach Christmas we will be reminded over and over again to be prepared for the glory of the coming of Christ. We rejoice in the barn with a newborn child with nothing to his name, and no promise of excess of worldly goods. It is the arrival of the Magi that grant us some insight into that which is to come. They bring Frankincense, Gold, and Myrrh. Frankincense indicates a deity, God. Gold is a gift for a king. And Myrrh is the oil in which his body will be embalmed. Our God, Our king, and our death. This is the life of Christ.

Now we wait. We know all too well when we will celebrate the birth of Christ. The shops have been anticipating it for a couple of months now. Even as we enter shops today it is highly likely that we will hear Christmas carols on the internal sound system. The shelves are stacked with stuff that leap up and down demanding to be purchased so that our Christmas will be properly enjoyed with an abundance of stuff that we will never use again. So, yes, we know all too well when Christmas will be.

And a resounding NO as to the question of whether we know the time and day of the second coming of the Christ. The only instruction we have is the recurring theme to watch, and to be prepared.

Our preparation must therefore be securely linked to the teaching of our Lord. We are to love God, and we are to love our neighbour. We are to pray, and we are to worship. We are to give ourselves to God, and in doing so we will be free; and above all, we will be prepared.