

## Advent 1 – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2025

Isaiah 2:1-5 – Ps 122 – Romans 13:9-14 – Matthew 24:36-44

Three elderly brothers ended up living together. They were 98, 96, and 94. One day, the eldest went to take a bath. After filling the bath, he put one foot in, then suddenly stopped. He then yelled down the stairs “Was I getting in or out of the bath?” The 96-year-old yelled back “I’m not sure, I’ll come up and see”. He got halfway up the stairs, and suddenly stopped, before also yelling, “Was I going up or down the stairs?” The youngest was listening to his brothers while enjoying a coffee and reading the paper. He shook his head and said “Boy, I sure hope I never get that forgetful”. He then knocked on a wooden table for good luck. Before pausing and yelling back, “I’ll come up and help you two as soon as I see who’s knocking at the door!”

Hope is the first of four virtues we celebrate during the season of Advent. The ensuing three in order over the coming weeks being peace, love, and joy. Others add faith too. They are represented by the four candles lit from week to week and which signify inherent qualities to the divine nature of the Light of the World, Jesus Christ (John 8:12). And whose birth we celebrate on Christmas Day with the lighting of the Light of Christ. It is these same four qualities with which we are also called to witness to the world the reality of Jesus, as we wait with anticipation for Jesus’ promised return (Matthew 16:27), at this time we call Advent.

Advent is a Latin word meaning arrival or emergence of a person, thing, or event. It was translated from the Greek word “parousia,” which originally denoted the coming of a deity, any deity, in human form, whether Christian, Jewish, Greek, or you name it. It is uncertain when Advent was first instituted by the Church as a liturgical season, other than being recorded as a celebration within Catholic tradition since the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. By 567 it had primarily become a penitential rite where fasting was required at least three days a week. Since the 9<sup>th</sup> century Advent had begun being celebrated on the four Sundays before Christmas, finishing on Christmas Eve.

The concepts of both Advent and Parousia have since been theologically appropriated within Christian tradition to refer more specifically to the second coming or return of Jesus into the world. As with the four virtues, they are therefore similarly anticipatory. Not only of Christ’s return, but the coming of Christ’s birth at Christmas, and if we think about it, the moment when Christ first comes into a believer’s heart. Another word often associated with the Second Coming is the Apocalypse, which as scripture foretells, incorporates all the unpleasanties that are to befall the world when the end times are finally upon us. It is also known as the Day of the Lord. All of which brings us back to what are regarded by the Church as the Four Last Things upon which we are also called to more penitently reflect and meditate: death, judgement, heaven and hell.

Not surprisingly then, that we commence the first Sunday of this new Advent season with the gospel reading from Matthew in chapter 24. And particularly which for the most part fundamentally centres on those not so good end times which are to pre-empt the eventual return of Jesus, or the Parousia (Matthew 24:3-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Revelation 1:7). Once again in vs 36-44 Jesus reiterates the imperative of being mindful that He will one day actually and most definitely return, and to keep alert to the signs that will pre-empt His return. Remembering perhaps just as importantly that only God the Father knows when these events will actually transpire. As frustratingly challenging as that has always been to digest. Which would’ve been helpful over the two subsequent millennia if all the pseudo prophets had taken the time to remember. So rather than speculatively pre-empt God, we are to be more specifically, and perhaps more humbly so, focused on being prepared for His return. Just like preparing for the possibility of a thief attempting to break in at night when we’re least expecting it. Unlike the mob who ignored Noah’s warnings and got caught out when the rains eventually came. After refusing to take God’s warnings to heart.

Of course, it hasn’t helped that the Parousia has been a no show for so long either. Especially after almost 2,000 years. And especially too, given that the 1<sup>st</sup> century early church genuinely believed Jesus would return

within their lifetime, or at least within the next 40 or so years after His ascension. Even by Paul. As he exhorted that it was time to wake from their sleep, for (the fulfilment of) salvation was nearer than when his audience first became believers (Romans 13:11). That said, he often also used sleep metaphorically for being dead, such as when he referred to the dead being the first to be raised upon Jesus' return (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). However, on this occasion at least, more likely he was referring to the spiritually dead. Or the spiritually compromised, or as he says "asleep". As in by continuing to engage in old worldly habits like revelry and drunkenness. Or idleness. Which is probably why he exhorts us all to wake up from those things which compromise and/or distract us from being prepared for Jesus' return. As much as they can also distract us from recognizing the times. And dupe us into believing it will never happen in our lifetimes.

This is equally important for when things are going along quite smoothly too. Perhaps even more so. For there is nothing more subtly deceptive than being cajoled into believing we can always put things off until another day. Whether giving our lives to Christ as we deliberate whether we really need all that religious mumbo jumbo. Or as believers when our faith is being waylaid by distractions and/or poor choices. For this reason we are not to be complacent. We are not to wait until after the good times, before it's actually too late, and the end times are already upon us. Remembering just as importantly, that one way or another, whether we believe in the Parousia and the imperative of Jesus to be prepared for its eventuality or not, none of us know when we will be called home by God in the meantime. Instead of God, of course. And again, which more often usually comes unexpectedly like a thief in the night.

That all said, we should probably consider the metaphors of the two people doing various activities together before only one is taken away or disappears while the other is left behind. As we would expect much has been theologically made of this over the years too. Aside from where the taken are actually taken, which we are not explicitly told either. This text is one that is often used to allude to what is called the Rapture, and whether for example, it will occur before the end times, during the end times, or after the end times when Jesus has finally returned. Again, only God really knows. And while it would be preferable to happen before the times of trial really kicked off, it is not definite. Neither is it definite that it refers to the taken being the ones receiving salvation. For they could just as easily be like those similarly swept away as in Noah's day, before getting the opportunity to give their lives to Christ. Reinforcing again the importance of not putting off commitment. Or again ensuring we are living in preparation. For His return.

Does this mean that we are to spend every waking moment in fearful anticipation that our demise could befall us at the drop of a hat, only to catch us out unawares, and therefore guilty of incurring the Lord's wrath because we didn't have our spiritual bags packed and ready? Well, probably not. But it does serve as a reminder that our priorities, and motivations in this life be directed by where we will spend eternal life (Romans 8:5-6). And not this life. To be living in the resurrection life with Jesus, in the Kingdom of God, available to and in us, through the Holy Spirit, right here, right now. That all said, there remain others for whom the end times, the Parousia, or Advent, has either transpired, for example with Jesus' resurrection. Or for whom they form a recurring spiritual cycle faithfully continuing to replay throughout history as has occurred for the past 2,000 years. As baptised believers called to endure wars, famines, and persecutions.

Still, as believers, we are nonetheless called to continue to live as Lights of Christ to the world. Knowing that the time of seeking and committing our lives to Christ, hoping in all His promises, is always now. Whether Jesus' promised return happens tomorrow, next week, or in a hundred years. Because the Kingdom of God is here in the now, in us, in the Body of Christ. As we celebrate that while only God the Father knows when that time will be (v.36), we are still called to live in preparation, driven not by fear, but in persistent and expectant hope, peace, love and joy. Leaving our old ways behind, putting on Jesus, and living each day as if His second coming were today. The Advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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