

“There is Nothing Cute About the Coming of the Lord”

Mark 13:24-37

All through the month of November, as we approached the end of the Church Year, we have been reading of the End Times, the Last Day, the Day of the Lord which will be darkness and not light. And now that we start over with the New Year, the season of Advent is upon us, the hopeful anticipation of the coming of the Lord. And our Gospel reading once more is filled with darkness and fearful images of the Last Day.

With the coming of Advent, for most people, this means it is Christmas-time. Thanksgiving is over, so Christmas is the next big thing. But first there is Advent. Advent serves a two-fold purpose: We prepare for the coming of Jesus as the child of promise born in Bethlehem, but we are also to be on guard and awake and alert for His coming once again.

This, historically, is a penitential season – a time of fasting. That pretty much gets lost on all of us these days. Come and join us following our Wednesday Advent services – there won't be much fasting going on. It is hard to fast while you are eating cookies and fudge.

However, within the life of the church, Advent is a time in which we are remembering, with repentant hearts, that the end of

the world is coming soon and when we least expect it. Jesus will be returning, not as the meek child in a manger who came to die on a cross to pay for your sins, but, instead, as a Judge who will hold all of mankind accountable for every last trespass of God's Law.

Jesus tells His disciples that, in that day, "men will have to give an account for every careless word they have spoken." We talked about this last week in Bible class. Jokingly, I said, "That's going to be a long day."

Judgment Day means that you will be made accountable. Living under His grace, this is a good thing. You will be declared innocent, because Jesus has already made Himself accountable for you. The guilt of your sin was counted against Him. He chose to stand in your place and suffer death and hell for you.

When you read the appointed lessons for this First Sunday of Advent, it becomes clear that these days are meant to stir up, in our hearts, the awe and majesty of God – even a healthy dose of fear. There is certainly nothing "cute" about the coming of the Lord on the Last Day. No one would disagree with that.

However, during this season, keep in mind that the same is true concerning the first coming of the Lord as a baby. As we prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem, we are reminded that this is the incarnation of God. God becomes flesh. The Son of God is born as the second Adam. The Son of God will be born as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the

world by being the final Lamb of sacrifice upon the altar of the cross. There is nothing “cute” about the coming of the Lord. This is a time to be filled with the awe and majesty of the Living God.

This is a time to prepare. It is appropriate that we decorate our homes with messages of hope and symbols of joy. Advent is a time of hopeful anticipation. Behind the awe and majesty and fear of the Lord that is associated with His coming – God entering into the world is more than just a big deal, it is the only reason we have anything to celebrate.

If the Christ-child is not born, if God did not become man, then all the promises of the Old Testament are worthless and void. If the Son of God is not coming in the clouds with great power and glory to gather together the elect from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven, if there is no resurrection of the body, then, as St. Paul says, “We are to be pitied more than anyone” because we have been gathering together in vain. We have wasted our lives if Christ is not coming once again.

There is nothing “cute” about the coming of the Lord. This is all really serious business. However, the underlying theme in the days and weeks to come is the anticipation of joy unlike what we have ever known. There is certainly joy in the growing anticipation of the celebration of the coming of Christ at Christmas.

I love this time of year. I love the lights, the candles, the decorations – I even appreciate the ones that are meant to be

cute. There is a softer side to the story that is to be appreciated. I love hearing our children tell the story – seeing all the “friendly beasts” up here on Christmas Eve is really cute, and there is nothing wrong with that. I love seeing the faces light up out of the darkness at our Christmas candlelight service. I love participating in the body and blood of the Son of the Living God, who came into this world, who took on flesh, who now feeds His chosen people with that flesh and blood given and shed for you.

What we celebrate during Advent and Christmas, God coming into the world, is really serious stuff. However, there are aspects of our celebration over the next month which are fun, exciting, and probably don’t express the fullness of the majesty of God. And that is OK because I don’t know how you would begin to do that in the first place.

But we are reminded by the season of Advent that there is nothing “cute” about the coming of the Lord. These are days filled with the awe and majesty of the Living God. He has come just as it was promised of old. He comes to you in His flesh and blood and fills you with His grace, just as He said. He is coming. Be on guard; keep awake; for you do not know when that time will come. Amen.