



Church of the Epiphany

FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Advent II • Cloudcroft, New Mexico • December 8, 2024



Collect for Advent II

Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and the comfort of your holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Readings for Advent II

Malachi 3:1-5
Psalm 126
1 Corinthians 4:1-21
Mark 12:38-44

Indeed, the Lord has done great things for us already, Whereof we rejoice.

Good morning and welcome to worship this fine Second Sunday of Advent. As we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest today's readings, we readily recognize the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. In particular, what we read from Malachi chapter 3 set forth the expectation of the coming of both the Messiah and His messenger, John the Baptist, who will prepare the way. Indeed, we heard from John the Baptist in the Gospel reading, announcing that he is there to "Prepare the way" and setting forth a little of what that will mean. During the Advent season, as we look forward to the Christmas celebration, we hear an abundance of prophecy of the coming of the Messiah

At the same time, we often say during Advent that we are also looking forward to the **Second** Coming. Actually, in our weekly Eucharistic celebration, we proclaim "Christ has died, Christ has risen, **Christ will come again.**" But for whatever reason, the selected lectionary readings for Advent do not tell us much about the Second Coming. Perhaps that is a reaction to the rumor that in some churches, they do not seem to talk about much else. It seems like preaching about the End Times can easily become more sensational than substantial, and we surely don't want to go there - not in the Anglican Church, Heaven forbid! I suspect that many of you have heard of the futuristic movies and TV shows and books such as the Left Behind series that seek to portray what it will be like in the End Times. You may have heard about the

Rapture and the Millenium Reign and wondered why such things are never mentioned in the Anglican Church. Today I will try to help answer that.

First of all, Holy Scripture does make it clear that **Jesus will come again!** In Acts, chapter 1, we learn that at the very moment the apostles were looking up in the sky, watching Jesus ascend back to Heaven in a cloud, two angels spoke to them, telling them plainly that Jesus will return in the same way He just ascended. You may remember that Jesus Himself said unequivocally in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 24, that He will come again. His disciples asked Him specifically in verse 3, "Tell us when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming, and the close of the age." Jesus' answer runs through chapter 25, and He confirms what the disciples apparently knew when they asked these questions. When He returns, it WILL be the close of the age, the end times, the final judgment. Jesus also provided a few clues about what must happen **before** He returns. There are other prophetic notes scattered throughout the Bible, but they are, at best, just bits and pieces, falling short of giving us even a rough outline. Yet we hunger to know what is going to happen, and when, and how, and even where. In that same chapter 1 of Acts, however, Jesus made it clear that He does not know when, only the Father has it on the calendar.

Of course these are not just curiosity questions. They have to do with eternity for us all. In leading the Wednesday afternoon Bible study on Revelation the past several months, I have gotten acquainted with volumes and volumes of commentaries, studies of prophecy, and other texts, some of which claim to have interpreted Scripture so as to discern exactly what is going to happen and when and how. It sometimes reminds me of those news stories about individuals or groups claiming that the world will end on such and such a date. Without exception, of course, all of those dates have come and gone and the world is still here.

Yet such publications, books, and many televangelists sound so convincing! The folks

who attend the Revelation study are a curious mix from different church backgrounds, all of whom are seeking truth, even though several have firm opinions as to how prophecy should be interpreted and what it means. Nevertheless all opinions are freely set forth and supported (or not) in our discussions. In my preparation, I regularly refer to as many as seven commentaries, two well-respected study Bibles, and other sources about end times prophecy, most of which draw different conclusions from the Revelation text and associated Scripture references. Some are firmly convinced one way, but others profess alternative views. We began our study back in January and are just now beginning chapter 15. As you might have guessed, it is difficult to condense all of what the experts think they know into a Sunday sermon.

So what **do** we know for sure? Well, I can confidently assert that I have found nothing that contradicts mainstream Anglican teaching. That is not to say that recognized Anglican sources address all the ideas and theories that have been put forth about the end times. For example, neither the Anglican Catechism nor the Book of Common Prayer mention the Rapture or the Millenium Reign. My favorite study Bibles do address such subjects and try to explain the basics. Each week, we recite the Nicene Creed in which we say, "We believe He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and His kingdom will have no end."

So we know the Lord is coming back. We know that there will be some signs that we may or may not recognize. After all, the 1st century Jewish leadership had meticulously studied the prophecies of the Messiah in Old Testament Scripture. These were some of the best minds of their time, and yet they still failed and refused to recognize Jesus when He came face to face with them. My prayer is that we will not be so blind. But Satan can and often does blind us to the truth. Without doubt, Satan is alive and well and still operating as the father of lies. And people still listen. Indeed, several chapters in Revelation tell us about desperate warfare in the last days

between God and His angels and Satan and his minions, both sides seeking the souls of those who have not yet repented and come to Jesus for salvation.

Clearly, God is doing all He can to provide a final opportunity for everyone to repent of their sin and come to His table. Someday, perhaps when we least expect it, maybe even in our lifetime, the final judgment will happen. God's absolute holiness will not allow any other alternative than final justice. And we will be there, with all who have gone before us. As Jesus graphically explained in Matthew chapter 25, He will recognize and separate the sheep from the goats, and at that point it will be too late for repentance. Eternal fire or eternal glory. It does not have to be complicated. Those who have been made holy by the blood of Christ will be with Him for eternity. Those who have refused that offer remain unholy. Eternity without Jesus will not be pleasant.

Yet even when we hear His promises again and again, it is difficult for us to open our hearts to the Savior and put our trust in His mercy as assured by His one sacrifice on the Cross for all. It is a challenge to fully invest ourselves in our Confession and fully believe what we say we believe in the Creed. It is most difficult to accept His unconditional forgiveness. We see the depth of our sin. He also sees our sinful bodies, but He sees that they have been made clean by His body. We fear our souls are lost, but He sees souls who have been washed through His most precious blood. And finally, we pray each and every time we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Eucharist that God the Father will, in the fullness of time, put all things in subjection under His Christ, and bring us with all His saints into the joy of His heavenly kingdom, where we shall see our Lord face to face. Thereafter we will evermore dwell in Him and He in us. That is the essential truth of the End Times that we need to know. Jesus won't care whether or not we believe in the Rapture or how we understand the Millenium Reign. He will want to know what we did with the gifts He gave us and how we treated the littlest, the least, and the lost. In Christ, we need

not fear the final judgment. We will rejoice when we see each other there. AMEN

Fr. Frank

Prayer List - 12/8/24

Revs. Carl Brenner & Barbara Brenner
and the congregation of
Christ Church, Farmington, & St. Philip's, Cortez,
CO
Bishop Steven and. Tricia

Those who need your healing care and strength:

Frank & Carolyn Wilson
Crystal
Thomas Zima
Ellie
Donya Conine; Wayne Conine Jr.
Mary Espinosa
Chip & Alyssa Taylor and baby Julius
Rev. Elias Rosales Mendez
Rev. Abraham Castillo's wife who has
dengue fever
Baby, Naomi Jade Dircherl and her
family
Machele Lackey and Susie Sims
Paisley Ryan Creed

Those in the Armed Forces:

Dominick Rankin, US Army, Ft. Bliss, TX
Gabiella Murley, Ft. Bliss, TX
Mason Gregg, Camp Courtney, Okinawa
Creed Napier, US Air Force,
J.W. Grove, US Navy
Nicholas Tran, Joint Base Lewis-
McChord,
Shawn Zima, Hong Kong
Wyatt Green, US Navy

We pray for our Epiphany family:

Matthew Flores,
Walter and Carolyn Ford
Esther & Joel Fyock
Aliene Gainey
Tom and Fran Gregg
Nancy Knowles

Lessons for Advent 2
December 8, 2024
Anglican Lectionary
year C

Old Testament Reading

Malachi 3:1-5

3 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. **2** But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. **3** He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. **4** Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. **5** "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

Psalms 126

1 When the LORD overturned the captivity of Zion, *
then were we like those who dream.

2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter *
and our tongue with shouts of joy.

3 Then they said among the nations, *
"The LORD has done great things for them."

4 Indeed, the LORD has done great things for us
already, *
whereof we rejoice.

5 Overturn our captivity, O LORD, *
as when streams refresh the deserts of the south.

6 Those who sow in tears *
shall reap with songs of joy.

7 He who goes on his way weeping and bears good seed *
shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him.

New Testament Reading

1 Corinthians 4:1-21

4/1 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. **3** But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. **4** For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. **5** Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. **6** I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. **7** For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? **8** Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! **9** For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.

New Testament Continued

10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. **11** To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, **12** and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; **13** when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. **14** I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. **15** For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. **16** I urge you, then, be imitators of me. **17** That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. **18** Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. **19** But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. **20** For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. **21** What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

The Holy Gospel

Luke 3:1-6

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, **2** during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. **3** And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **4** As it is written in the book

forgiveness of sins. **4** As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

