

Advent 2015
Christ Will Come Again (1)

This weekend is the First Sunday of Advent and the beginning of a new liturgical year. Although we do not sing the *Gloria* during this season, Advent is *not* a penitential season in the way Lent is. Rather, it is a time of quiet waiting and reflection as we anticipate the coming of the Lord in the mystery of Christmas and at the end of the ages. Thus Advent has a double focus. First, it draws our attention to the return of Christ at the end of the ages when he will come to judge the living and the dead and gather the elect into his kingdom. Second, Advent draws our attention to the coming of Christ in the mystery of Christmas—that moment when we celebrate the mystery of the Word made flesh, which is the mystery of the Incarnation.

As you listen to the readings during Advent you will note there is an important progression. During the first week of Advent, our focus is on the coming of Christ at the end of the ages. During the second and third weeks, our attention turns to John the Baptist who announces the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. In the fourth week, the Church turns our attention to the Virgin Mary who quietly and prayerfully waits for the birth of her child. Thus the readings of Advent move from the coming of Christ at the end of the ages to his first coming in history as they prepare us for the coming of Christ in Christmas mystery.

The opening prayer of today's Mass is especially rich. It reads: "Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom." This prayer captures the central meaning of this season. We are to "go forth to meet Christ," having lived our life in Christ.

Christ is always coming to us, and so we must "go forth" to meet him. Christ is ever ready to welcome us into the kingdom of God, but we must "go forth" to meet him. This is why the church prays for the "resolve" to go forth and meet her Lord.

In today's first reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, the Prophet says the days are coming when God will fulfill the promises he made to Israel: God will raise up a descendant from the royal line of the great king David, a king who will do what is right and just. For us who believe in Christ, Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise. He is the long-awaited Messiah for whom the people of Israel hoped. He is the savior of his people Israel and of the world. He is our savior.

In today's second reading from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, the great apostle prays that our love will increase so that we may be blameless in holiness when the Lord returns at the end of the ages. On that day Christ will gather his elect into God's kingdom. If we hope to be gathered into the kingdom on that day, we must be blameless in holiness. This is why the Apostle prays that our love will increase and abound.

Finally, in today's gospel Jesus speaks about his return at the end of the ages as the glorious Son of Man. When and how that day will occur, we do not know. But when it comes, people will be filled with fear and anticipation of what will happen: fear of judgment and

anticipation of salvation. Since that day will come suddenly and unexpectedly, we must be vigilant at all times so that we will be able stand in the presence of the Lord.

Advent is a time of hope and anticipation. During this season we hope for and anticipate the salvation the Lord will bring at Christmas and at the end of the ages. During this busy and frenetic period, take time to reflect upon what is truly important—the salvation God gives us in Jesus Christ, both now and in the future. *Father Matera*