

POPULUS ZION / THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Text: St. Luke 21:25-36

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name; Thy Kingdom come....”

This prayer, the prayer that our LORD JESUS CHRIST taught us, the prayer we have come to know as the “VATER UNSER” or “OUR FATHER,” is one of the first prayers we Lutherans learn as children. With this prayer, we ask that the Kingdom of God be made manifest among us. Though His holy Kingdom comes of its own accord and at a time of the FATHER’s choosing, we still pray that God would send His Kingdom among us that, when JESUS appears at His second advent, we may not be caught sleeping but are counted among those in whom His Kingdom flourishes and His Name is hallowed.

During the final days of our LORD’s first advent, His disciples asked Him how they would know the last days had arrived, *“Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?”* In response, JESUS first foretells of the desecration of the holy temple and the desolation of Jerusalem by the Roman army. He then reveals the signs of the ending of the age, the coming of the SON OF MAN with power and great glory on the clouds of heaven, and the approaching Day of Judgment.

Judgment Day, just as God’s Kingdom, comes of its own accord on a day and at a time which our God has appointed. It cannot be avoided by ignoring it. Open your eyes and ears. See and hear that the Day is coming quickly. *“Look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”* God’s Kingdom is coming and so is His judgment!

The signs our LORD speaks of are not signs of the end of creation but are preludes pointing to the end of creation and the coming Day of Judgment. What are these signs?

“There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the SON OF MAN coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

Do our LORD's words frighten you? They should not. You are a baptized child of God, an heir to His grace and mercy, and a citizen of His Kingdom. These signs are what we pray for; they are the answer to prayer for which Christians have waited down through these many ages, and they speak of our victory over sin, Satan, and the grave won for us by the innocent suffering and death of our LORD JESUS. They are signs of God's promise fulfilled and the vindication of our faith, and they herald the arrival of our SAVIOR who returns to establish forever the Kingdom of God. JESUS' words are words of comfort and hope for all who believe. Therefore, *"Look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."*

Types of these signs have already taken place though one may not have recognized them. Have the skies not already been darkened when JESUS was put to death? Were the heavens not shaken when the temple veil was rent from top to bottom; the veil which included a tapestry of heavenly bodies? Did the SON OF MAN not reveal His glory on the Cross of Calvary in His act of sacrificial redemption? Does He not also reveal His glory in Word and Sacrament in every Mass? Each of these signs are a prophetic fulfillment of JESUS' words about the end of the age and His promised return. That is, they foreshadow what is to come before the great and final Day of our LORD's reappearing.

Yet they are not *the* signs. The signs of JESUS' prophecy will not happen successively, but just as in the days of Noah, they will appear all at once as a global cataclysm which will not allow for escape. They will be the final signs that the Kingdom of God is near. These signs serve to herald the end of our long winter of discontent and the coming of the glory of summer for the *"fig tree, and all the trees,"* are budding and about to bloom. *"Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."*

For those who refuse to believe, CHRIST's words are terrifying words of warning. For the sons and daughters of God, they are words of hope and an invitation to joy. Hypocrites and those who refuse to believe will have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. God's children will have no reason to fear, no reason to run, no reason to hide. Unbelievers will see the signs and tremble with fear. God's children will see the signs and shout, *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!"*

Oblivious to JESUS' warning, the unbelievers among us will continue to live as they always have right up to the last moment. They will be trapped as if by a hunter's snare with no time for repentance. The hypocrites among us will suffer the same fate. Again, as in the days of Noah, unbelievers and hypocrites, alike, will eat and drink, they will marry and be given in marriage, nothing in their lives will change and they will anticipate no disaster until the snare springs and their lives and all they treasured will be destroyed.

It shall be as in the days of Lot when, without warning, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

Therefore, do not allow yourself to be caught unawares. Do not become weary or discouraged; *“your redemption draws near.”* Our LORD speaks of these signs of God’s approaching Kingdom and His glorious return that *“through the patience and comfort* [of His Word] *we might have hope.”* Hope, as the word is used in Holy Scripture, does not mean maybe or perhaps, it is a word of conviction as though the thing hoped for is already an established fact. Those who hope in God and His promises will not be disappointed.

For all those who hope in the LORD, for all who fear His name, *“The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings.”* The Sun of Righteousness has arisen in Bethlehem and has gone on to Jerusalem to purchase your salvation. He has come with healing in His wings, and under them, He gathers His people as a hen gathers her chicks. He has come as the promised SON OF DAVID to redeem His people.

JESUS comes as Your Redemption. He died your death, and with His death, He killed your sins. His death makes you worthy to stand in His presence, not by virtue of anything in you, not by your own merit or works, but by virtue of His cleansing forgiveness, poured out in His Blood on a hill outside Jerusalem, and given to you in the waters of your Baptism and the wine of His Holy Supper.

JESUS has conquered death by submitting to it. He has given Himself as a ransom for the guilty. He has been lifted up in the Sacrifice that forgives all sin and reconciles men and women to His FATHER. The tomb is open! The grave has lost its sting.

Rejoice, for *“your Redemption draws near.”* Your Redemption comes to you through what the LORD has instituted to be the worship life of His Church: preaching, Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the LORD’s Supper. In these, JESUS’ purpose is to prepare the people of God for His triumphant return on Judgment Day so that they may lift up their heads and stand before Him at His return.

The Word of Baptism, of Absolution, the Word of His last Will and Testament in the Cup of the Altar—these will not pass away. The Word that called you to life in the waters of Holy Baptism, that gave you God’s Name, will not pass away. You will be His forever. The Word of forgiveness given in blessed Absolution, the Word that declares you righteous; this is not my word; it is no man’s word; it is the Word of God in JESUS CHRIST, and He has promised you that it will *never* pass away.

So it is, that by grace, through faith, you will be righteous forever. This is the LORD’s unshakable promise and His sure mercy; and His mercy like His Word, endures

forever. For no one can undo what our LORD has declared. Nothing changes the LORD's pledge. No one can undermine what the LORD has promised He will do, and He has promised to save you.

So, my friends, “...*look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.*” Rejoice! Look up and pray! Look for your SAVIOR and hear Him say, “*I forgive you all your sins.*”

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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