

**THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT—POPULUS ZION**

TEXT: ST. LUKE 21:25-36

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

*“Come quickly, LORD JESUS,”* is the prayer of every Christian, or at least it should be. Even the youngest child among us quickly learns to pray with his or her family, *“Come LORD JESUS, be our guest.”* This we Christians pray because this is our most fervent hope and greatest desire, that JESUS would quickly come and take us away from this vale of tears to be with Him forever at His Wedding Feast that knows no end.

Though no man knows the day and the hour of CHRIST’s return, not even CHRIST Himself, still JESUS tells us of the signs of His imminent return that we shall not be caught unawares and therefore, unprepared. He tells us, *“...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. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”* Thus, every man and woman is without excuse. We have been warned. CHRIST is coming, and the Day of His return may be sooner than we think.

Therefore, consider the fig tree... in the fall, it begins to lose all its leaves and its fruit, if not harvested, has long lain rotting on the ground. In winter, it seems nothing more than a skeleton of its former self, its branches outstretched to a gray sky as if in mournful prayer. But when the first buds appear, we know summer and rebirth are near. New life is about to spring forth and what winter has done its best to kill becomes again heavy with fruit and life.

So, we Christians watch and pray, all the while looking and longing for our LORD’s expected return. But still, we must be careful. Again, no man knows the hour or the day of our LORD’s return. Thus, we are not to look to the signs in order to predict a day and a time of our LORD’s return. No! We look to the signs in order to be prepared for His coming.

Therefore, JESUS’ Words of warning are not for prediction. Their purpose is that of all biblical prophecy—preparation. It is as we confess with all the Church, *“He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead.”* We know that JESUS will return as our Judge, therefore we should watch and anticipate His coming at any time, especially when He is least expected.

In the days of Noah, they were eating and drinking, and marrying; their hearts were weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the cares of this life. They were not aware of the coming judgment even though pious Noah preached it, and his building of an ark on dry land

proclaimed it to an evil generation—and the flood came and destroyed them all. In the last days, the days that herald our LORD's imminent return, it will be no different. The Day of our LORD's return is fast approaching. The Day of JESUS' return *"will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth."*

Therefore, be warned; do not be weighed down by the things of this life. Do not let anything or anyone confuse your thinking and cloud your awareness of the LORD's return. For when your heart is self-contented, having been ensnared by the things of this passing world, when your heart relies on the words of men and forgets the Word of GOD, when your heart relies on the kings of this world instead of the KING of kings, it will have been deceived, and that in which you have placed your trust will fail, with the result that you will not *"be counted worthy to stand before the SON OF MAN."*

Therefore, let our LORD's words stand as a warning! Do not follow the ungodly crowds, but be heedful of the signs, for Judgment Day will come so quickly that escaping it will be impossible.

Repent! Be on your guard; stay alert! Our LORD warns, *"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things."* For JESUS is coming and the end will come upon the unprepared more swiftly than they could ever have imagined, just as a snare. That snare will instantly trap all the unbelieving in their own unbelief.

Therefore, consider the creation. In the fall, all that had been created good and very good began to die and all the fruit of creation lay rotting and stinking upon the earth. Creation is nothing more than a ghost of its former self, and it groans in mournful prayer for the promised salvation. But 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..."* all the world *"...will see the SON OF MAN coming in a cloud with power and great glory."* When you see these signs know that your Redemption draws near and the Kingdom of GOD is upon you. *"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and Earth will pass away, but [the Words of JESUS] will by no means pass away."*

Be prepared, but do not despair, for we do not mourn our dead as those who have no hope. For the same reason we are not to fear the coming of our LORD on the Day of Judgment. The Words of our risen, LORD and SAVIOR are given to us that we can find comfort in the midst of the evil in this world, focusing not on what we see, but on what is heralded and foreshadowed by what we see. JESUS tells you that *"when these things begin to happen,"* when these signs of the end of the age appear, you are to *"look up and lift up your heads, because your Redemption draws near."* JESUS tells you that you should open your eyes and ears to what is happening in the world around you, not that you should fear, but that you should know the time is near for His return, the time has come for you to rejoice.

Therefore, *“Look up and lift up your heads, because your Redemption draws near.”* 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. To redeem you.

JESUS comes as Your Redemption. He died your death, and when He died, He put your sins to death. It is faith in His atoning death that 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, reconciling men and women to His Father. This means that your tomb is open! Your 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 the Day of Judgment so 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 and certain mercy, and His mercy, like His Word, endures forever. Therefore, 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 for your SAVIOR and hear Him say, *“Do not fear My child. I have come to bring you home. For I have already forgiven all your sins.”*

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

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Rev. Raymond D. Parent II  
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church

Crestview, Florida  
12/7/25 ASD