



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Year C

Jeremiah 33:14-16
1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

GATHERING

(An advent wreath and candles rest on a table covered with dark lavender cloth. Downloaded from a computer, an empty calendar template and a bible opened to Matthew 5:1-12, the beatitudes, rest beside the wreath.)

This week we reflect on the mysterious Christian expectation of Jesus' coming in "power and great glory" and how we are to prepare for that time whose coming we cannot know. Reflecting on your relationship with Jesus, what "more" would you like in your relationship as the new liturgical year begins? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(A candle is lit. The leader invites the community to quiet awareness of the Lord in their midst. A brief selection of instrumental music is played.)

Leader: I arise today in the security of God's providence; God's safety net is there to catch me as the ground gives way beneath my feet. God's storehouse of abundance is there

to provide for me all manner of good things; God's ear is there to listen to me and cradle my story; God's compassion is there to hold me and dry my tears.

All: Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus.

Leader: From every harsh expectation, within and without; in self-sufficiency or in doubt; against relentless ego absorption that may drive my body but shrink my soul, you are there....

(Members take turns praying the invocations that follow.)

I: Jesus, the Christ, my brother

II: Jesus, the Christ, my friend

III: Jesus, the Christ, my teacher

IV: Jesus, the Christ, my redeemer

V: Jesus, the Christ, my defender

VI: Jesus, the Christ, my protector

VII: Jesus, the Christ, my lover

VIII: Jesus, the Christ when I work

IX: Jesus, the Christ when I rest

X: Jesus, the Christ from my beginning into my ending

XI: Jesus, the Christ over and with and through and in all who fill my life.

All: Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Loosely based on the Breastplate of St. Patrick

Focus Question

- ◆ Recall a time when an uninformed, unexamined expectation led to a missed opportunity.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

A promise is a promise is a promise, especially when spoken by the Lord through Jeremiah, his prophet, to Israel in exile. Through the prophet, God promises to raise up out of the line of David an heir who will do righteousness and justice. Throughout Israel's centuries of life and struggle, this promise developed into an expectation, the expectation of a messiah who would deliver the people from the hands of their enemies. And so, Israel longed and looked for a strong, powerful leader to throw off the humiliating domination imposed by mighty empires. They awaited the coming of their messiah, the anointed of God, to fulfill the promise.

How, then, did Israel fail to recognize Jesus as the Christ? It would seem that their very expectations, colored by their world's definition of power and glory, and their own neglect of God's Covenant law of righteousness and justice, produced a self-deluded blindness? But then, are we doing much better?

Twenty-first century believers, in solidarity with the earliest Christian communities, hold an expectation of a second coming of Christ at the fulfillment of the reign of God. With the apocalyptic imagery of the time, we hear in this week's gospel that his coming will be signaled by cosmic cataclysm and with the Son of Man arriving on a cloud, surrounded by power and glory. We acclaim this promise of return, spoken from the mouth of Jesus, at every Eucharistic liturgy, "Christ will come again!" Advent calls us to wait with conscious attention for this time of fulfillment.

How much better prepared are we today for his second coming, than were our Jewish forebears for his first? But the Source of the promise and the Promise itself bear a necessary likeness. Will we childishly expect to see stars and moon falling from the sky as a sign of doomsday? Will we interpret

hurricanes and melting polar ice caps as signs the *end* is near and Christ's judgment is about to be visited upon us?

Rather, using Israel's example as a cautionary tale, let us understand this scripture as dramatic metaphor. We await the Son of Man and his reign that will complete the transformation of our hearts and the transformation of our world. We prepare for his victory, not by wringing our hands, but by working with his Spirit for the practical triumph of the meek, the merciful, the righteous, the peacemakers – those who outlasted and overturned the constellations of powerful tyrannies to “stand erect” before their Judge and Lord with joyfully raised heads. His “power and great glory” spills out from his act of unrelenting love delivered from the judgment seat of the cross. Let us read this gospel as a great mystical invitation to join Christ yet more deeply in the fulfillment of his mission of love and mercy, justice and peace.

We are grateful for the promise given. We rejoice in the promise received. We look with anticipation for the promise to be fulfilled.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How strong is your faith when you proclaim, “Christ will come again!” in the Eucharistic celebration?
- ◆ How is Christ inviting you these days to join yet more deeply in the fulfillment of his mission of love and mercy, justice and peace?
- ◆ Where do you see God's reign being accomplished by the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers? What share do you have in that work?
- ◆ To what extent do “the anxieties of daily” life dull your spirit and distract you from attention to God in your life?
- ◆ How strong is the fear factor in your life as you look at events of the world around you?
- ◆ What are your hopes and expectations for your life in the years immediately ahead?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ This Advent pay particular attention to the Eucharistic acclamation,

“Christ will come again.” Sing it with verve. Sing it so that those around you know you mean it.

- ◆ Be a part of Christ's kingdom work of peacemaking. Connect with the work of Pax Christi (www.paxchristiusa.org) to see how you might engage.
- ◆ Support the meek. Learn about Ahava Kids (www.ahavakids.org), which rescues and cares for children who are victims of human trafficking. Get involved. When you visit the web site, click on “What You Can Do.”

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader says to the members, “Let us be in touch with the Lord who wishes to come more deeply into our lives.” The community sits in extended silence, after which a member of the community reads the scripture that follows.)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:1–4

Leader: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

All: Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus, come!

(The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)