

2021 Advent Bible Study:

The Coming of Christ

Week 1: Luke 21:25-36

The Signs Of The Coming

Week 2: Luke 3:1-6

God's Servants Must Prepare The Way For The Coming Christ

Week 3: Luke 3:7-18

What Should We Do To Prepare Ourselves

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Responding To The News Of The Coming Of Christ

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Week 1: Luke 21:25-36

The Signs Of The Coming

Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, 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 take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Reflection:

Jesus, like the prophets, prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem as a sign of God's judgment on the people of Israel. It was not a sign of permanent rejection, but a sign of God's woe, God's sadness of the state of the people. God saw the lack of sincerity of the people's worship, their unwillingness to give justice to the poor, and their failure to care for the needy.

But God does not leave anyone in judgment, but offers redemption. God provides a time of healing and restoration to call everyone back into relationship with him.

Generally, Christians are warned to be careful of false prophets who claim that they know when the end of time will occur, as they use disasters to lead God's people astray.

Note in verse 28 – the signs of the times do not point to destruction, but rather that the time of redemption has arrived.

²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

It is God's will to use even what we may consider to be devastation, for our redemption. God speaks to us through the events of life. In this case – Jesus tells us that what we see as destruction is God's redemption for us.

We are therefore encouraged to be alert as we prepare for the end of time.

Questions:

What are some of the events that we do not always see as positive, but afterwards we have seen the goodness coming out from them?

As we prepare to receive Jesus – what are the things that we have placed before him in our lives, that need to be removed?

Are we prepared to release the hurt, disappointment, anger, bitterness and other negative feelings that have filled us, so that God can fill our hearts once more?

Does being alert mean that we only look out for the coming of Christ? What work can Christians do while we are waiting to receive Jesus?

Let us Pray:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when He shall come again in His glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through Him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Week 2: Luke 3:1-6

God's Servants Must Prepare The Way For The Coming Christ

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Reflection:

In the previous reading we were asked to empty ourselves of the distractions and all things that fill us, so that there would be space for God.

Today, we meet John the Baptist who had done just that. He had put aside all the trappings of life. He retreated to a desolate and uninhabited place. It was there, in the wilderness that he heard the voice of God telling him to prepare the way.

God could have chosen any of the important political or religious leaders that are mentioned in the text. But it was not to them that God's message was directed, but to a simple man, in a deserted place. John was open to hearing the word of God, he was prepared to respond, and he had the courage to act.

He began to proclaim that redemption for God's people was coming. They were to prepare themselves, by repentance and baptism.

Questions:

How does God speak to us? Is it necessarily as in the movies when the sky parts, a light shines down and a deep male voice speaks?

Are we open to hearing the voice of God?

Are we prepared to respond to God's urging for us to carry the message of hope that redemption is available through Jesus Christ? Or is that someone else's task?

Let us Pray:

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Week 3: Luke 3:7-18

What Should We Do To Prepare Ourselves?

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Reflection:

John the Baptist stood in the wilderness, the same place where the people of Israel were first formed as God's people, rather than in Jerusalem.

There out in the wilderness they could see how much they had wandered from what God had called them to be as a people. The promises they had made as a people, about how they would worship and praise God, and live with each other were abandoned when they crossed over.

Now they were forced to see themselves and the sins that they had committed against God, their neighbours and themselves.

The people must repent and be baptized, be restored to God. But they must not only go through a ritual act of cleansing, they must also live out the redeemed life – and bear the fruits of repentance.

They must act. The lack that they saw around them were to be addressed, and in so doing they would have shown their love for neighbours, and through it their love for God.

The naked were to be clothed, justice was to be given to all, fairness was to return to their dealings with each other, cheating was to be discarded. One could not claim to be living the new life, and still performing sinful actions.

Questions:

Can you recall when you decided that you would follow Jesus Christ, your Baptism and/ or Confirmation services? Do you remember the promises that you made?

Have you lived up to them?

What are some of the responsibilities that Christians have in relation to God, our neighbours and ourselves? Have we lived up to them?

If we have not been faithful to our promises, how can we get back on track?

Let us Pray:

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Week 4: Luke 1:39-45(46-55)

Responding To The News Of The Coming Of Christ

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

[And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."]

Reflection:

We are told that Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth after she realized that she was pregnant. Elizabeth was also pregnant. She was very old and was considered barren. She did not expect to ever give birth to a child.

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and greeted Mary with a blessing. Mary in turn began to praise God and prophesy.

She started by celebrating God's faithfulness to her and her people.

Then she began to speak about a new world that would be shaped by God's intentions. In it, the wrongs of the current world would be made right. The poor would be fed, the wealth that the rich unjustly gained would be taken from them.

The story of the two women tells us about God bringing life into impossible situations.

The barren woman and the young virgin both give birth to new life although the world would say that it was impossible for them to do so.

It reminds us that nothing is impossible for God; but we must trust God and believe.

Questions:

What are some of the difficult circumstances that persons are experiencing now?

How can God use us, to bring about a change for the good in those situations?

Can we as believers pray about some of these situations?

Let us Pray:

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at His coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for Himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Christmas Day: Luke 2:1-14(15-20)

Bearing Witness To The Arrival Of Christ

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

[When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.]

Reflection:

At the time when Jesus was born, the Roman governor called for a census to count all the people so that they could be taxed.

Joseph and Mary were obedient. They travelled the eighty or so miles from Nazareth where they lived, to Bethlehem, the hometown of Joseph.

Due to the census, all the rooms that were in the town were filled. Joseph and Mary had nowhere to stay. They were offered a stable by an inn-keeper.

While they were there Mary gave birth to a Son, she laid him in a manger.

Angels announced the birth of the child to poor shepherds who were minding their sheep. They had no gifts for him, but they rushed to see for themselves if what the angels had said was true. They found the child and Mary and Joseph, just as the angels said. They then told others what they had seen.

All that happened was to fulfill scripture.

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2

Jesus' birth itself was a fulfilment of the promise the angel made to Mary in Luke 1:30-33

That Jesus is the Saviour sent by God – fulfilment of Zechariah's Song - St. Luke 1:69-70

Note:

Jesus was not born in a palace or rich dwelling, but in a simple poor stable surrounded by animals.

Those who came to see him were not rich and important persons, but very poor shepherds.

This tells us that Jesus could identify with the poor and their struggles.

Questions:

How many actions show obedience in the reading?

Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem

Mary calling her son – Jesus

Shepherds going to see the child

Are we obedient to listen and respond to what God calls us to do?

Let us Pray:

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Him, and to be born (this day) of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Sunday After Christmas - Week 6: John 1:1-14

Accepting Christ

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reflection:

“In the beginning” reminds us of the start of the book of Genesis where the same words are used to describe how God created life.

Here, John tells us, that Jesus – the Word, was present at creation. Jesus participated in the act of creation. All things came into being through him.

However, if we take John 3:16 into consideration – we would fill in what happened from the time of creation and Jesus coming into the world as a child.

The beautiful creation needed to be saved from the consequence of sin – which is death. God loved all that he had created. God decided to save creation, by sending his Son, Jesus. But humans must believe in him in order to be saved.

John was one of the persons who was called by God to tell others about Jesus Christ. John testified, or bore witness that Jesus was the Son of God who was coming into the world, to save us from sin.

Questions:

Is it easy to believe in Jesus Christ today?

Do we believe that Jesus can restore us and make all things new again?

Where do we find some of the statements about what we believe about Jesus? In the Creeds?

Let us Pray:

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*