

“WHAT CHILD IS THIS?”

Message for the First Sunday in Advent

From Pastor Norman Staker

November 30, 2025

ISAIAH 2: 1-5 ** ROMANS 13: 11-14 ** MATTHEW 24: 36-44

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND FROM
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN. HE IS RISEN; HE IS
RISEN INDEED.

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Do you believe that Jesus will one day come back from where he has gone? Do you believe that there is actually going to be a point of time in our history, or better: in our future, when God will intervene in the flow of history in a way that will have a cosmic impact? Let’s have a show of hands: Who believes in the second coming of Jesus?

Let me ask you another question: Do you believe that Jesus could actually return during your lifetime—anywhere between today and some dozens of years from now? Who of you believes, that we could actually witness the second coming of Jesus while we are still alive?

One more question, and then you can sit back and relax. If you believe that Jesus is coming back and that that could be any time soon, how does that affect your feelings and emotions, your stress levels, your choices, and your behavior: the way you use your time, your money, and your resources? Think of that for a while: Does the thought of Jesus coming back soon have any impact on your life as you live it today? And I mean: real impact!

Well, I don't know what your answer is to that last question. What I do know is this. Christians react very differently to the idea of Jesus' second coming.

There have always been people with a strong sense of urgency about this. Many revival movements throughout the history of the church have brought this urgency to the surface. Their message has been pretty much the same as that of John the Baptist and Jesus: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!"

Today we begin to prepare ourselves for the celebration of Jesus' coming. As we prepare, we don't talk about how many shopping days are left. We don't frantically review our lists; we don't look at our calendar and gasp. No, we take a deep breath, and believe it or not, we relax. Yes, we relax. Advent is a time when we need some space, some quiet time.

How many of you have gotten all your Christmas shopping done already, not part of it but all of it? Hey, don't look at me like that! I heard about a lady who always tries to get her Christmas shopping done before Advent begins, so she can focus her attention on the spiritual meaning of the season during these weeks. For most of us, including myself, it's already too late to get our shopping done before Advent begins; Advent is already here! But, there's hope; we can still take time to set aside some space in our schedule for quiet, for reflection, for prayer, and for reading the scriptures.

If you want to drive your family crazy and especially your wife, I did it a couple of times with Joyce, but you call home from somewhere and tell the spouse or whoever answers the phone, to get ready because someone is coming to dinner; you don't take the time to tell them who, then you hang up. They don't know who is coming, or when, whether it is someone important, or a relative, a good friend, a total stranger. There will be highs and lows until you walk in the door with this person.

This is Advent Sunday, the start of a new church year. It's the threshold of the Christmas season. It has the mystic beauty of the dawn of a new day, a new beginning, a morning when the world is made new. It is as the glory of a spiritual spring with its promise of summer.

So do the festive songs and the inspired Word on this Advent Sunday come as a promise of and a prelude to the Christmas joy. They herald His coming, and tell us of the advent of His kingdom, growing clearer and brighter as the great day comes

near, when the angel choirs shall blend their celestial harmonies with the voices of the children of men.

The Word of God today is a call to us to awake out of sleep, to get ourselves ready quite early. It is not the thunders of judgment that we hear today. It is not the noisy clanging of an alarm clock. It is more like the bird songs of the dawn, God's wonderful chorus awakening the sleeper with gentleness and beauty.

There are many who are not awakened by these notes. They sleep, until the louder, startling calls come. And so today there are many who are not fully awake, who fail to catch the beauty of the dawn.

The call will become louder. Next Sunday there will be thunder and flashes of lightning in the preached word, when the Lord tells us that the powers of heaven shall be shaken. But even that will be the call of love, of divine grace, prompting us to respond in joyous song.

A few moments ago, we lit the first candle on the Advent wreath, the candle of peace, as a signal that someone is coming and we have 4 weeks to get ready. But ready for who?? Who is coming?? Our first item of business this Advent season is to answer the question posed by one of my favorite hymns: "What Child is this, Who laid to rest; On Mary's lap is sleeping?"

What child is this who is coming? What does he mean for us?? How will we accept him?? Does he get confused with someone else's coming? I would imagine if we ask our children who is coming they might answer with another song that is sung often during this Advent season: "You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town!! He knows when you've been sleeping, he knows when you're awake, he knows when you've been bad or good. So be good for goodness sake!"

During the next four Sundays of Advent, we will answer this question, "What child is this?" who is coming into our midst at Christmas time.

Our gospel lesson and our first lesson tell us something of this child. It tells us that he is a judge. He will decide something about our fate. It is sort of funny, that the first Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday of the church year, has a text that looks at the end instead of the beginning.

Our gospel text and the text from the first lesson deal with the end of time, the time of God's final judgment upon the earth. But I think it is very appropriate for us to begin here, because as we learn about this child and his message for us, we will be more ready to accept this message and live in this message if we know the promise of his second coming.

We traditionally speak about this text as the second coming of Christ, but is that the correct terminology? Does this mean that Christ has not fully come into our world that we need a second coming?

The inherent problem with a phrase like Second Coming is that it carries the implication of not here yet. That phrase, 'second coming,' is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible.

----- But Jesus is not stuck in traffic.... The Redeemer of the world wasn't sent to us with the wrong zip code... delayed until the Postal Department gets their act together..... the Word of God is present in everything and everyone.... everywhere.... right now!

Advent isn't a season where we hang out for a while until Christmas happens... Advent is a season where we learn once again to be an expectant people..... a people who anticipate.... a people who read the signs....a people who look painstakingly for the invasion of Christmas everywhere! "

We don't know the time of that judgment. Some say that with all the terrorist activity we have experienced now, with the spread of Aids, with the so-called moral decline in our land, that the end is near. But is it?

The text says no one knows when, you cannot look at the signs around you to know when, but be ready.

What child is this? It is a child who comes now and is here now and will judge us when the final end of time comes upon us. There is joy as well as readiness, or watchfulness, in this coming.

What Child is this?? This child is one who will bring a judgment to the human race, as well as the hope and the promise of eternal salvation for those who are waiting and believing.

What Child is this? He is the child who comes now to bring us hope and salvation, and he will continue to come into this world until the final days when he will bring all creation under his domain and control.

We must trust in his promise of salvation for our time and for the future. We must trust and believe in that promise as we live in these in-between times. The times between his coming at Christmas and the time of the final judgment.

Trust and believe in this Child! What Child is this? This is the child that will help us believe and trust in His saving grace in our lives.

So what do we do now? What does one actually do in-between times? In-between the first coming and the second coming? Jesus tells us simply to be ready. I say the only way to be ready is to celebrate a 1-1/2 coming Advent. You heard me! A 1-1/2 coming Advent! A coming that occurs in-between, where Jesus arrives in our lives right Now!

I'm not going to await the coming of the birth of Jesus—He's already come!

I'm not going to anticipate the death of Christ for my sin—He's already washed me clean!

I'm not going to look forward to a time where He rises from the grave—He is risen indeed!

I'm sure not going to waste my time pondering the Second Coming, because Jesus tells us only God knows when that is going to happen.

All I do is try to get ready by spending my time celebrating the fact that Jesus offers to come into my life on a daily basis. That's why I have no problem with decorating the church or singing Christmas songs during Advent. We need to celebrate and never cease preparing for the coming of Jesus every single day of the week.

We live our lives in-between the first coming and the second coming. The first Advent where God takes care of your past—washing away your countless sins. The second Advent where God takes care of your future—promising life everlasting. The only thing left to do is celebrate the 1-1/2 Advent or the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in-between!

When Jesus comes into your life today, you will know how to act at home, at school, at work.

When Jesus comes into your life today, you will know your mission and purpose in this lamp stand of God.

When Jesus comes into your life today, the in-between times will be the best times of your life on earth—not regretting the past, cherishing today and looking forward to every tomorrow.

When Jesus comes into your life today he will give you something to look forward to—something to dream about—you know something to keep us going.

When Jesus comes into your life today, there will be only one thing to do in-between times and that is to get ready!

We are called right now to hope; to cast aside our cynicism and despair, to embrace the hopeful vision of Isaiah, to let it touch our lives right here, right now, as we finish our November and look forward to December. We do so even as we look forward to a day, God only knows what day, when it will fully be realized among us and among all people. About that day and hour no one knows, but when it comes nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Amen!!