

ADVENT 2009

THE DAYS OF SALVATION HAVE ARRIVED

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“...may he establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thess 3:13).

This is our hope as we begin once again this year the beautiful season of Advent. This is a time of hopeful waiting and preparation for the coming of the Lord into our world, into our lives, and into our hearts. It is a time for meditating on the prophecies of the Old Testament to see the hope of Israel for the Messianic days, in which there would be peace in the whole world, a heavenly peace, not of this world, not of this age. During Advent, we long for the fulfillment of these prophecies. This is why during Advent we prepare with eager expectation for the parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ, for in his coming with power and great glory on the clouds of heaven, accompanied by all his holy ones in great light, all the prophecies will be consummated. Then there will be new heavens and a new earth (Is 65:17), and we will be transformed, with the peace of heaven in our hearts, and the joy of the Lord filling us.

During Advent, we also prepare ourselves for the joyful celebration of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In him the prophecies are fulfilled, and in him heavenly peace came down to earth to renew our hearts, making us a new creation, new men, filled with the Holy Spirit and the joy of the Lord. In the birth of Jesus Christ, the salvation prophesied was realized, and the kingdom of God began on earth. Those who believe in him are born again in him and now see and live in the kingdom of God that he brought upon the whole earth. The meditations of Advent and Christmas renew us, and the kingdom of God transforms the world. Christmas and the coming of Jesus Christ into the world is when the dream of peace and salvation seen by the prophets is realized on earth for our transformation and illumination. What the prophets prophesied for the end of the age came in Jesus Christ in the middle of the age instead of only at the end, as the Jews were expecting. No one expected what actually happened—namely, that the kingdom of God, prophesied for the last days, would come now in Jesus, the Messiah, in the middle of history. Nonetheless, this is what actually happened. The fulfillment of prophecy came on earth in the birth of Jesus Christ, and this fulfillment is with us still, renewing us and gladdening our hearts with the joy of the Lord.

During Advent, we enter into the beautiful mystery of the fulfillment of prophecy in Christ, and we prepare ourselves for its final consummation in manifest glory on the last day with the parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his holy ones in great light. We prepare ourselves now for his glorious parousia by believing in Christ as our Lord and

Savior and by being born again in him and living in his kingdom, giving glory to God on high, and on earth living in his peace with our neighbor.

And this peace is not our own but the gift that Jesus brought to earth at his birth when the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Lk 2:14 KJV).

St. Paul’s wish for us is that God “may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thess 3:13). We are to be blameless and prepared for that great day of final salvation. We are drawing ever nearer to it. It is therefore now time for us “to wake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Rom 13:11). We should be more prepared now than when we began to believe. We should be in a continual state of preparation, growth, and sanctification. “...the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:12). We are to cleanse our life. “...let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in gluttony ... But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:13-14).

Jesus tells us the same thing. “...take heed to yourselves,” he says, “lest your hearts be weighed down with gluttony and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; for it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk 21:34-36).

If we did this, we would be in a constant state of preparation and vigilance. And this is precisely what we are supposed to do—be constantly preparing ourselves for that final hour by living now in the fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus Christ. We are now in the final days. We are living in the Messianic times, the times of the fulfillment of prophecy. In Jesus Christ we have heavenly peace, and we should give glory to God in the highest, and on earth live in Christ’s peace with our neighbor.

Jeremiah prophesies that the days are coming when the Lord will raise up a righteous branch from the root of David and will bring salvation to Jerusalem. God will fulfill the promises he made to David and bring his people the salvation for which they long. “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer 33:14-15). This was the vision of the prophets. A new Davidic king would arise, a Prince of Peace, “and the government will be upon his shoulder ... Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore” (Is 9:6,7). This is the kingdom that we now live for and in. It is here. Peace on earth, the dream and promise of the prophets, has come in the birth of Jesus Christ in a stable in Bethlehem. He is the promised Messiah, the longed-for righteous branch of David, the new David that shall “execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer 33:15).

Advent is the time of hope when we realize that these prophecies of a new golden age of peace on earth and righteousness in the land have indeed been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Lord promised David that he would “establish the throne of his kingdom for ever” (2 Sam 7:13). “In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and

glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel” (Is 4:2). Christ is the branch. Those who are born again in him are the fruit of this beautiful and glorious branch of the Lord. This prophecy is fulfilled already in Christ and in all who are in him by faith and renewal of life. He puts joy into our heart and light into our mind. In him is the new life of God, and God reigns gloriously over all who are in him. Their sins are forgiven, their guilt removed. The longings of the ages are indeed fulfilled in him. Come, therefore, to the waters and drink!

The old world nonetheless goes on, oblivious to all this, but those who live now in this kingdom of heavenly peace rejoice in the Lord. They are in the light while the rest of the world is in darkness, sorrow, and confusion, just as the Israelites had light while the plague of darkness covered the land of Egypt. He is our peace, and his peace extends to the ends of the earth (Micah 5:4-5).

We who live in this kingdom of heavenly peace, pardon, and salvation bless the earth by our presence and renew it ahead of time before the final tribulations of the last days when the stars will fall from the sky, the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and the Son of Man will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Then the archangel will blow the last trumpet, and Christ will send out his angels to gather in the elect from the four winds (Mt 24:31). Then will come the great harvest of the earth, the ingathering of the fruits of the earth, and the final consummation in glory of the kingdom of God, which has come ahead of time, in the middle of history, in such a silent and humble way in Jesus Christ.

Then “there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Lk 21:25-26). Then “All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree” (Is 34:4). Then “the stars will fall from heaven” (Mt 24:29). “...and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place” (Rev 6:13-14).

These are the dreadful signs and days that still await us as we hope and long for the final coming of the Son of Man in all his glory. So we live now in the kingdom of God that was brought to earth before these great signs in a hidden and humble way, in a spiritual and interior way, renewing the hearts of all that accept it. If we live in its heavenly peace and joy, we will be prepared for his coming in glory to consummate all things. Living in this way is living in the spirit of Advent, a spirit of both longing and fulfillment.

We rejoice in the kingdom of God now present among us, within us, renewing us, renewing the earth, extending in the world the universal reign of peace and righteousness of Jesus Christ, a kingdom of salvation, forgiveness, and new life, a new golden age, interiorly at work, transforming the hearts and lives of those who believe. This joyous fulfillment of prophecy is the basis of our hope and longing for the extension of that golden age in the world to transform the earth so that there will be no end to peace, justice, and righteousness. We long during Advent for this manifest reign of righteousness and peace on earth that only the kingdom of the Son of God can bring. We

live for this dream of the prophets as we live in it even now and pray and work for its actualization in the world when the branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be our pride and glory (Is 4:2).

This is the new golden age that we now live and work for. Such a hope will not disappoint. It is the motive for our present work for the Lord, and it will keep us firm in the trials and tribulations that are yet to come upon the world. We who live in this hope will not be shaken when the heavens are shaken and the stars fall upon the earth and persecutions rage against us. We already live in the kingdom that is renewing the world. The new golden age has already dawned upon us, and its radiance shines in our hearts. The Sun of Righteousness has risen upon the world (Mal 4:2), for unto us has been born in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Lk 2:11). In him the peace of God has come to earth and filled our hearts.