

The First Sunday of Advent

Sunday between 27 November and 3 December inclusive

Principal Service readings

Jeremiah 33.14-16	The days are coming when God will establish justice
Psalms 25.1-9	Confidence and trust in God
1 Thessalonians 3.9-13	To be holy and blameless for the coming of Jesus
Luke 21.25-36	Signs of the end times; be alert

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Signs of the end times

Jesus said to his disciples: ²⁵“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. ²⁶People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’

²⁹Then he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; so as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³²Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, ³⁵and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be 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.’

Comments and Questions

Today, Year C of the liturgical cycle begins, focusing on the gospel according to Luke. As well as being the last of the synoptic gospels to be written, around A.D. 85,² Luke's is also the longest (slightly longer than Matthew's). Luke's is the only gospel with a preface that tells us what the gospel is about. The gospels assume the existence of faith; they were not written to prove that Jesus was the Son of God. Luke has three major concerns in his gospel: martyrdom (the appeal of selfless commitment); miracle (the power of God); and the fulfilment of prophecy (showing God's intentions).

Luke's audience is a mixed group, made up of Antiochan Jews and Gentiles. Some are wealthy, some are not. Against the fear of persecution, Luke tries to instil the conviction of being willing to lose everything for the establishment of God's reign.

In the passage that begins Advent Jesus tells his disciples that he will return a second time. They will know that it is time for his arrival because of cataclysmic signs. These might strike terror in his followers, but he also promises then that they have nothing to fear. Through vigilant prayer and conscientious living they will be better prepared for this.

Quotations

1

In His coming the "last day" to which the Old Testament looked forward arrived, but they have not yet run their course; the Christian church is still living in this eschaton. Jesus' first coming inaugurated it; His second coming will consummate it. The coming of Jesus was, therefore, the beginning of the end.

Jesus and the Old Testament / R. T. France. 1998

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

² Matthew's dates from around A.D. 80 and Mark's from around A.D. 70.

2

Let us consider this settled: that no one who has made progress in the school of Christ who does not joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection... Let us not hesitate to await the Lord's coming, not only with longing, but also with groaning and sighs, as the happiest thing of all. He will come to us as Redeemer.

Institutes of the Christian religion / John Calvin. 3.9.5 (1536)

Related topics

For further study:

Advent; eschatology; kingdom of God; Christ's coming; future, present, past; Son of Man; parousia

Closing Prayer

<text> God, you show your saving hand
in the midst of collapse,
and in the ending of all things
you reveal the advent of your reign.

Sharpen the senses of our spirit,
that speaking as your prophets
to interpret the signs of the times,
we may encourage others to lay aside fear
and await with us the coming of your kingdom.

We make this prayer through Jesus Christ,
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.

*Celebrating the Christian Year · Advent 1, Year C*³

³ *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C* / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.