

Luke 21:25–36
Advent II (Populus Zion)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
December 10, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. The signs are everywhere. The changing of the weather. The Christmas markets and the Christmas lights. Listen to the music on the radio and you can sense that Christmas is fast approaching. On this second Sunday of Advent, Populus Zion, we consider the signs of the times, the signs pointing to the coming of Christ, both at Christmas and at the end of the world. Jesus uses a similar example: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the Kingdom of God is near." Oh daughter of Zion: "Behold, your salvation comes." First, as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, and then in a cloud with power and great glory. All signs indicate that Christ is coming soon, and so we prepare our hearts and minds for His imminent return.

In our Gospel Lesson this morning, Jesus teaches about the signs of the end: "There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken." From the beginning, from the fourth day of creation, the sun, moon, and stars have been signs, signs of the end, even. God said: "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, for days and years." The sun rules the day and the moon rules

the night. No matter which hemisphere you find yourself in, certain constellations of stars indicate what season it is. Up here, when Orion starts coming over the horizon, you know winter is approaching. If you spend enough time looking up into the sky, you'll start to notice the cycles of the heavens. And soon you realize that what once had a start will soon have an end. God's wrath is revealed from heaven. The patterns we observe in nature will come to an end when our Lord returns to judge the living and the dead.

God warned His people against bowing down, worshiping, and serving the sun, moon, and stars, and all the host of heaven, a trap nearly all pagans fall into (Deut 4:19). The sun, moon, and stars are only signs pointing to something greater, to the Creator of the heavens and the earth who holds all things in His hands. The sun, moon, and stars are not just signs in general, though. There were also specific signs in the heavens pointing to things to come in salvation history. The star of Bethlehem you see everywhere from Advent through Epiphany is one of those prophetic signs in the Heavens. In Numbers 24, Balaam prophesied: "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." That's why the Wise Men from the East could ask: "Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him." An astronomical event pointed to the birth of Jesus.

It was a sign in the Heavens that proclaimed the birth of Christ, and there were signs in the heavens and on the earth during the rest of our Lord's earthly ministry. Anytime Jesus healed the sick, miraculously fed the hungry, or calmed a storm, creation confessed itself to be in the presence of God. There were also signs in nature when our Lord was crucified for all sin. For six hours there was darkness over the entire land—a sign in the sun. After Jesus yielded up His spirit, the earth shook and the rocks were split—a sign on the earth. And at His resurrection from

the dead, there was yet again an earthquake. Events in the heavens and on the earth accompanied the mighty acts of God for our salvation.

It's no wonder, then, that there are signs in nature pointing us to the End of all things, to the return of Christ to judge the living and the dead. The signs in the sun, moon, and stars continue. The cycles of the heavens remind us that the cycles in nature will one day come to an end, going up in flames. The nations are in distress because of the roaring of the sea and the waves. They are scared of nature because of what it reminds them of: their vulnerability before forces outside of their control. There is faintness in the hearts of God's enemies. And if the sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight (Lev 26:36), how much more so the stirring up of the depths of the sea? Without the hope of eternal life, many people live in utter fear of what is coming upon the world because the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Apart from God and His Word, nothing man stands upon is stable. It's all collapsing around us. No philosophy of this world, no ideology, no political system, no church body, no network of family or friends, no military—nothing can protect us from the coming wrath except Jesus Christ and His Word. That's what the signs are pointing to.

And then we will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Christ came the first time in humility, as a newborn baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. He came in humility, weakness, and vulnerability to die for our sins in humility on the cross. But His second coming will be with all power and glory. He will descend from the clouds even as He ascended into the clouds, this time with a trumpet blast and the cry of an archangel. The dead in Christ will rise first, and then with them we and all who live upon the earth will stand before the LORD. That last day is Judgment Day. The books will be opened and the dead will be judged by what is written in the books, according to what they've done. And if

anyone's name is not found written in the Book of Life, he will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:11ff).

It might not sound very "christmasy," but Advent is about preparing for the coming of Christ, not only as a baby in Bethlehem, but as the judge of all people on the Last Day. The coming of Christ at Christmas reminds us that He's coming again soon. And for most people, if they really think through it, this is a dreadful thought. If we're judged by what we've done, we'll be found wanting. But Jesus tells us: Do not fear. He says: "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." He doesn't say: "Face the end stoically, like a captain going down with the ship." He doesn't say: "There's nothing you can do about it, so accept fate like a man." He says: Straighten up and raise your heads, *because your redemption is drawing near.*

For the unbelievers, the Last Day is dreadful. It's the beginning of eternal death. But for those in Christ Jesus, those who are baptized and believe in Him, trusting in Jesus Christ alone for all good things in life and in death, the Last Day is the continuation of eternal life. Eternal life begins already here in time. And after Jesus returns it will continue forever and ever in the new heavens and the new earth. For those who believe, the second coming of Christ is a welcome relief from the burden of sin we struggle with every day of our lives. The second coming of Christ, His second Advent, is our redemption drawing near, when all the benefits we receive from the cross of Christ become ours in their fullness, beheld with our very eyes. The signs are all pointing to the coming of Christ, so straighten up and raise your heads: your redemption is drawing near!

The signs are all indicating that Christ will be here soon. In fact, everyday is one day closer to the end of all things. So, Jesus says, "watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed

down with dissipation [or overindulgence] and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.” The signs in the heavens and on the earth are all reminding us that the end of the world is at hand, so its time to start living and organizing our lives as if that’s true. Otherwise, it’d be like seeing all the signs of Christmas fast approaching and then forgetting to have the food and the presents ready. If the signs are there, then we’re left without excuse.

Jesus tells us exactly how to prepare for that day. Heaven and Earth will pass away, but His words will not pass away. Hold onto those words, the words of Scripture, for dear life. They’re the only thing certain in this ever-changing world. Stay awake, stay focused, and stay in tune. Recognize the signs God has established. Use God’s Word and Sacraments, use the power of prayer to drive away all those pleasures and the busyness the world is trying to distract you with during this season of preparation. Pray that you might have the strength to escape these things and and pray that you are able to stand before the Son of Man. It’s by His grace alone that you are able to stand. The battle before you is fierce, the road long, but He who saved you is faithful and He will preserve you to the end. Remember: Your Redemption, our Lord Jesus Christ, is drawing near. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.