

From the November 4, 2008, Issue

Advent Year B

Christ the King Sunday

Eze. 34:11-16, 20-24 - Ps. 100 - Ps. 95:1-7a - Eph. 1:15-23 - Matt. 25:31-46

The gospel is that through the work of humanity's King, all people have been included in the Triune Life, the eternal dynamic of love shared between Father, Son and Spirit. All people (and indeed, all creation) can forever truthfully say "It is [the LORD] that made us, and we are his people...and the sheep of his hand" (Ps 100.3; 95.3,7). Christ our King has come. And as he now sits on his throne of glory at Father's right hand (Matt 25.32; Eph 1.20), we live there with Him, receiving every spiritual blessing in heavenly places (Eph 1.3). One of these blessings is judgment/justice (Ezek 34.16; Mt 25.32). This particular blessing hurts, but we count it all joy because such discipline is proof that we are indeed beloved sons and daughters of Father (Heb 12.5-9). We are judged to be 1). Beloved children of Father, and 2). Living out-of-sync with this reality. This incongruity hurts like hell. Human life happens within the eternal Flow of Triune Love, but it is possible to live in denial and try to act counter to Love (Mt 25.42-43). Like how a NASCAR driver is free to drive sideways. It's possible, just not necessarily wise. You are always free to "drive sideways" (forever, if that's what you want), but as long as you do, the Flow of love will continue to sideswipe you and cause you pain (Mt 25.41,46). But this "discipline of the ages" (usually translated "eternal punishment") has a fatherly purpose—the hope that the lesson will eventually be learned: Go with the Flow.

The hope is that you will learn from the "Spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you" (Eph 1.17-18).

First Sunday in Advent

Isa. 64.1-9 - Ps. 80.1-7, 17-19 - 1 Cor. 1.3-9 - Mark 13.24-37

In the Advent season, we join with God's people across the ages to "wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1.7). His presence already fills every nook and cranny of the cosmos. And as knowledge of this truth fills the earth, the earth finds renewal. During Advent, we who know the truth celebrate this renewal which we are already experiencing. We confess with Isaiah the truth that "You are our Father...we are all your people" (Isa 64.8-9), and that our hope comes from Yahweh revealing to us his face, his name (64.2,7). With the Psalmist we cry "Let your face shine, that we may be saved" (Ps 80.3, 7, 19). With Paul and the Corinthian church we rejoice that Yahweh's face has begun to shine upon us in the man Jesus. And what we see in this face is not condemnation and rejection, but "grace and peace" (1 Cor 1.3). "In every way [we] have been enriched in him," and as he comes he fills us with his knowledge, strength and beauty (1.5-8).

But his coming also hurts. The flammable parts of our souls do not enjoy the coming of the Consuming Fire. Jesus comforts his Hebrew listeners even as he warns them of God's soon-coming

judgment on their nation (Mk 13.24-30). When we, like they, find our beloved idols being vaporized by the Consuming Fire, we can take comfort in knowing that the fire is an expression of God's unshakeable determination to destroy the darkness that inhibits our enjoyment of our life with him (13.31).

Second Sunday in Advent

Isa. 40.1-11 - Ps. 85.1-2, 8-13 - 2 Peter 3.18-15a - Mark 1.1-8

Christ's Advent (Coming/Arrival/Presence) is the fiery truth of the Triune Life finding expression in the world's flesh. His coming/presence "discloses [tells the truth about] the earth and everything that is done on it" (2 Pet 3.10). The Truth incinerates our delusional visions of Life-Independent-From-God (3.10-12). "The heavens will pass away...and the elements will be dissolved with fire" (3.10). "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isa 40.8). What is this eternal word that will outlast all things? The word is "COMFORT" (Isa 40.1) and "PEACE" (Ps 85.8). The herald cries "Here is your God!" (Isa 40.9), and forgiveness floods the earth (Ps 85.1-2; Isa 40.2).

This flood baptizes our vision in a total re-thinking (repenting) of everything we thought we knew about God and about ourselves (Mk 1.4-5). All people are called to experience the wholeness (salvation) of the Triune Life that has been freely given to us (Ps 85.9). With Isaiah we embrace the prophetic hope that as the LORD reveals his glorious presence, "all people shall see it together" (Isa 40.5). This is, in fact, the Lord's own hope—"not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3.9), for every eye to behold Him as He truly is. We share in God's hope, not because we are optimists, but because Christ—"the highway of Yahweh" (Isa 40.3-4; Mk 1.3)—has come.

Third Sunday in Advent

Isa. 61:1-4, 8-11 - Ps. 126 - Lk. 1:47-55 - 1 Thess. 5:16-24 - John 1:6-8, 19-28

When we look to the Coming (Advent) of Christ, we are looking to the Day of liberation and healing (Isa 61.1), mercy and abundance (Lk 1.53-54). We look for the Light to come and wreak vengeance upon the darkness that enslaves (Jn 1.17; Isa 61.2). We look for Truth to come and dismantle the systems of deception and oppression that rule our world (Lk 1.51-53). We look to the Day of the LORD to come and heal ruined cities and ruined people, clothing their brokenness with new garments of wholeness/holiness/salvation (Isa 61.4,10).

The gospel of Jesus is that this Day has arrived, that He Himself is the fulfillment of this hope. We now rejoice without ceasing, because "the LORD [has] restored the fortunes of Zion" (1 Thes 5.16; Ps 126). And as we believe the light (Jn 1.7) and live in truth (1 Thes 5.19-22), we experience the sovereign power of the Truth to sanctify us entirely, to keep us whole and unbroken at his coming (5.23), and to "cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations" (Isa 61.11). "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this" (1 Thes 5.24).

Fourth Sunday in Advent

2 Sam. 7:1-11, 16 - Lk. 1:47-55 - Ps. 89:1-4, 19-26 - Rom. 16:25-27 - Lk. 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel speaks the good news to Mary and to each of us: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Lk 1.28). And along with Mary, we find this greeting perplexing. Because certainly there must be more to it than that. Surely, it couldn’t be that easy! Like David, we are so often fixated on building a house (or doing some other impressive thing) for God (2 Sam 7.1). But to David and to us, God replies with a chuckle: *Step back, Jack, and watch ME build YOU a house!* (7.16). And indeed, Father has now built us a house—the house called Immanuel, God with us. The house is as durable and strong as the Father’s faithfulness to Jesus, Son of God, Son of David: “My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him...I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. He shall cry out to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!’” (Ps 89.24-26).

This is the true mystery of the ages, and it has now been revealed (Rom 16.26). In the Advent season we wait on the great thing God has done, is doing, and will do. We stand on tiptoe to receive ever-new eyes with which to understand what has happened. We hear the lips of angels say: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you,” and we respond with the only reasonable response there is: “Let it be with me according to your word” (Lk 1.38).

~ *John Stonecypher*