

December 1, 2024
1st Sunday of Advent
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Jesus said to his disciples: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand."

"Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."

Background:

With the first Sunday of Advent the Catholic Church begins a new liturgical year. The Gospel text for most Sundays will be taken from Luke's Gospel. While Luke's Gospel is very similar to Mark's and Matthew's Gospels, it is also unique. Luke's Gospel introduces Jesus' presence in the world with familiar accounts of Zachariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, and the Canticles of Mary and Zechariah that are part of the Liturgy of the Hours said each day by priests, religious, and many in the laity. Luke also includes stories about Jesus' encounters with the poor, marginalized, women, tax collectors, the oppressed and some Pharisees.

Scripture scholars generally agree that Luke drew upon Mark's Gospel. However, while Mark wrote before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, Luke wrote approximately 15 years after the Romans razed it. Luke tries to separate what has already happened from what is yet to come. The fall of the temple was emotionally disheartening for the Jews. Luke thus points to a much more vital event yet to come, which will be signaled by cosmic disturbances. These signs will signal the coming of Christ as Judge of the World.

All three synoptic Gospels of Matthew (24:3-44), Mark (13:3-37), and Luke (21:7-36) contain a narrative where the disciples marvel at the beauty of the Temple of Jerusalem and Jesus predicts its destruction. The disciples then inquire when this event will happen. Jesus responds by telling them that before this takes place, they will experience catastrophic events within creation and human disasters. His followers will undergo persecutions and some will even experience deaths. This description of future events in each of the synoptic Gospels is known as a "little apocalypse." Two weeks ago, on the 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Gospel was a portion of Mark's "little apocalypse." Today's Gospel is part of Luke's "little apocalypse."

The reader might hear the warning against giving in to carousing and the anxieties of daily life, and presume that Luke is addressing a social situation not very different from our own. While that might be one way to pray with today's Gospel, it would be helpful to know the particular situation that Luke's community was facing as Luke presents his Gospel. Luke's Christian community was a small splinter group of the larger Jewish community. In addition, most of the people of the day lived in dire poverty, wondering if they would have enough to make it through to the next day. They did not have the wealth to be concerned about getting drunk or be preoccupied with worldly possessions. When Luke addresses those who might be tempted to give in to drunkenness and the anxiety of the day, he is speaking to a very select group of people who are not only wealthy but also greedy. They are those who refuse to share the resources with those in need. In Luke's day these people lived without honor. Luke is reminding his community that when Jesus returns, the whole of creation will be changed, and each person will stand before the Son of Man as an equal. There will be no privileged!

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you encounter people who wonder if some present-day events are a sign of God's final coming? Are there times when you too think of that possibility? What do you respond to that kind of thinking?
2. What would you like to be your focus during this Advent season? What do you need to do to make that happen?
3. Luke tells the community of Christians that they should stand erect and raise their heads at the coming of Jesus. Have you ever prayed standing erect with your head raised? How might that affect how you pray? Would that be welcome?
4. From the perspective of the Jews, God seemed to delay sending the Messiah, and to the Christians, God seems to have delayed the return of Jesus. How do you experience God's delay? Does that inspire gratitude, anxiety, disappointment, or other feelings within you?
5. How might you approach this season of Advent in a way that might open you to grace that is found in waiting?
6. Can you talk with God now about how you feel about God's delay, or your waiting? Speak honestly to God, who wants to know your often-unspoken feelings and thoughts.

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for December 1, 2024, the First Sunday of Advent

The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah.

In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot;
he shall do what is right and just in the land.

In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure;
this is what they shall call her: "The Lord our justice."

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul. Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior, and for you I wait all the day.
Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice,
and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are
kindness and constancy toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees.
The friendship of the Lord is with those who fear him, and his covenant, for their instruction.

Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love
for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts,
to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.
Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that,

as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God and as you are conducting yourselves you do so even more.

For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said to his disciples: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.

"Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap.

For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth.

Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."

Excerpts from Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:4-14; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2; and Luke 21:25-36

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for December 1st, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. This is the First Sunday of Advent, and the beginning of a new liturgical year, year C in the three-year cycle, where the Gospels are primarily from Luke. In this Sunday's Gospel from Luke, Jesus tells his disciples, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars. Nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming. They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud. When these signs begin to happen, stand and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. That day will assault everyone who lives on the earth. Be vigilant."

The other readings have additional references to the days to come, the fulfillment of God's promise, waiting for God, and learning his way. In the first reading from Jeremiah, "The days are coming, says the Lord. I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, I will raise up for David a just shoot." Psalm 25 exclaims, "Teach me your paths, O Lord; make your ways known to me. For you I wait all the day." In the second reading, from his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes, "Strengthen your hearts, to be blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus."

On this first Sunday of our liturgical year, the Gospel story picks up from a point that we were at in Mark's Gospel two weeks prior, on the second to last Sunday of the previous liturgical year. Mark's chapter 13 very closely corresponds to Luke's chapter 21, where today's Gospel comes from. In each, Jesus has reached Jerusalem in the days just before his trials and crucifixion, and he teaches in the temple during the days and goes with the disciples to the Mount of Olives each night. Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple, and he tells them about signs of the end to come, and persecution and tribulation to occur before the Son of Man comes in power and glory. The part about the coming of the Son of Man is repeated in this Sunday's Gospel, this time as Luke tells it. The ending about the lesson of the fig tree is skipped. This Gospel instead goes to the next part for its ending, exhorting Christians to be vigilant. "Beware that that day catch you by surprise. Pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations and to stand before the Son of Man."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!

Everything that becomes visible is light.

Christ will give you light.

Watch carefully then how you live.

Ephesians 5:14-15