

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3: DEUT. 18:15-19

ADVENT 1

"I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him."

In this Advent season we prepare for our Lord's coming in three ways: His coming in the flesh, His coming in Word and Sacrament, and His coming at the Last Day. Today's text embodies all three of these themes. A Prophet like the Israelites Who will come from them corresponds to our Lord's coming in the flesh. He is born into the tribe of Judah as in our flesh.

Our Lord God put His Word into the mouth of His One and Only Son, so that He might fulfill the Law perfectly for us, and preach to the fallen house of Israel repentance toward the remission of sin. This corresponds to the theme of our Lord Jesus coming to us in Word and Sacrament. As He came to the Israelites by the preaching of His Word, He comes to us today, by the pure preaching of His Word and the right administration of His Sacraments.

Our Lord's coming at the Last Day is embodied in the words which demand that those who refuse to hear the Word of our Lord; it will be required of them. This refers to the judgment on the Last Day. The sheep and goats will be separated; the sheep on the right, the goats on the left. The sheep, those who believed the Word of our Lord, will receive eternal life. The goats, those who refused to believe the Word of our Lord, will receive eternal condemnation. Therefore, let us prepare for the coming of our Lord, with contrition and faith, and receive the forgiveness of our sins.

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THE GOSPEL

St. Matthew 9:18-26 (NKJV)

While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live.”

So Jesus arose and followed him, and so did His disciples.

And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, “If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.”

But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, “Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And the woman was made well from that hour.

When Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, He said to them, “Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.” And they ridiculed Him.

But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went out into all that land.

THE COLLECT

Stir up, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the wills of Thy faithful people that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of Thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.”

The Church Year is divided up into three major sections: Christmastide, Eastertide, and Whitsuntide. Each of these major divisions coincides with three of the four High Feasts of the Church Year. The Church Year begins with Christmastide; this includes the three seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. The overarching theme of this season is “Light.”

In this Advent season, we sit in darkness, and in the shadow of the Light that is to come. However, we have from our text today the promise of “a Star” that “shall come out of Jacob.” This Star is our Lord Jesus Christ; Whose Light shines in the darkness, and dispels the gloom of sin and death.

The Light of our Lord Jesus Christ fills the whole world during this season, by proclaiming to the ears of all the world that He has come into this dark world to dwell in our flesh, and “batter the brow of Moab,” that is, the powers of sin, death and the devil.

He batters the brow of Moab, and destroys all the sons of tumult by offering up His perfect obedience to the Law on the tree of the holy Cross in our place. He comes to us, sheds His Light upon us, and suffers our penalty; all that we might have forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. And so that we might have it abundantly, He destroys the powers of death and hell, in order that we might rejoice eternally in our redemption, stepping out of the darkness of sin and death, into the Light of our eternal reward.

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. . . . He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.”

This text is often called the blessing that Israel has for his twelve sons, but for the most part it sounds like the final scolding of a father to his disobedient children. But like all the other texts for this week, we are presented with a Messianic prophecy. “The scepter shall not depart from Judah.” In other words, a King shall rule over the spiritual house of Judah for all eternity.

That King is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who washed His garments in the wine of His own Blood on the tree of the holy Cross. He washed His clothes in the “blood of grapes.”

This imagery cannot help but draw to our minds the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, where in, with, and under the wine we receive our Lord Jesus Christ’s true and substantial Blood for the remission of our sins.

It is of no little coincidence that the Kingship of our Lord is tied to the shedding of His Blood on the holy Cross. This is His throne; this is the place where the disobedient spiritual children of Israel are redeemed from sin, death, and the devil. It is on the tree of the holy Cross where our Lord reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords for all eternity. And it is here, that our Lord comes and sustains all of those who have a share in the inheritance through faith, by pouring into their lips and hearts the Holy Ghost through the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

“And so all Israel will be saved.” This is what drives the Church to her missionary work. This is the Word that inspires the teaching of the Word to all nations. This is the truth that moves Christians to bring the Truth, Christ Himself (John 14:6), to Jews –and to others who do not know Jesus. The Holy Spirit proclaims that all Israel will be saved, and the Holy Ministry of the Church responds by preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments with missionary zeal.

That is how God works to carry out His timeless promise to save His people Israel. By His own design, God does not dispense saving grace and create saving faith in any way other than through the hearing of His Word and the receiving of His Sacraments. Truly, the Holy Spirit will bring certain ethnic Jews to know and believe that Jesus is the Messiah; yet this will happen in the context of Christian mission work, through the same means by which this enlightenment was brought to certain Gentiles. All Israel – which in its New Testament sense includes Jew and Gentile alike – will be saved, for God will bring forgiveness and salvation in Christ to all nations; He will do so by keeping His Church in mission until the end of the age, baptizing, absolving, and feeding His people Israel – even those of Israel of old!

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who loves to show mercy, hear the prayers which we offer unto Thee for Thine ancient people, that, acknowledging Jesus Christ, Who is the Light of truth, they may be delivered from their darkness; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” Literally, the term “tradition” signifies the passing of an object from the hand of one person to the hand of another. A tradition is a practice that is handed down from one generation of people to the next, so that the custom might continue. The tradition connects a younger generation to an older one, through the contemporary practice of the old custom. The tradition also identifies a modern people as being the continuation of an ancient one, as the practice continues to be lived out among them.

Saint Paul urges the Church to hold the traditions handed to her by the Apostles of Christ. For what has been handed over is what the Apostles had been handed – from the very hand of Jesus Himself. The Apostles conveyed through their preaching and customs that which they themselves had heard, seen, and handled (1 John 1:1). The doctrine and practice of the Apostles is the very Word and Life of Christ Himself, handed as tradition by Him to them, to connect them to Him and to identify themselves as one with Him. The tradition continues wherever Christ’s Word is purely preached and His Sacraments rightly administered, connecting people to Christ their Life and identifying themselves as the continuation of His chosen people – and as the continuation of the apostolic mission to convey this tradition, handing over of Christ to the next generation, for the sake of their eternal life in this blessed tradition.

Merciful God, we beseech Thee to cast the bright beams of Thy light upon Thy Church, that being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed Apostles, it may so walk in the light of Thy truth that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

The beginning of the Church Year does not begin with a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths. In other words, it doesn’t begin with the sentimentality and trappings of Christmas; rather it begins with the season of penitence called Advent—a season that is often skipped over by our over focusing on the approach of Christmas. Sinfulness proceeds redemption. Sorrow comes before gladness. Therefore, we must remember to give this important season its due.

This is why we have this text from the First Book of Moses regarding the demand of our Lord that Abraham sacrifice His son Isaac.

This event at first glance seems to portray our Lord as a little more twisted than we would like Him to be. Abraham had waited a long time for the birth of his son, his only son. And now he was to sacrifice him to our Lord. What?! But the proper meaning of this text is easily discerned when one considers the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a picture of the penalty that we deserve for our sin, and the redemption that our Lord wins for us by sacrificing His Son, His only Son, on the tree of the holy Cross on the very mountain where Isaac was to be sacrificed by Abraham—mount Moriah. Therefore, let us give thanks to God that He has come in the flesh, to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil, by supplying the Ram of His Son Jesus Christ, Who was raised again to life on the third day.

“Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man.”

The evening texts from the Daily Lectionary of *The Lutheran Hymnal* all begin the Church Year by pointing us to our sin and the redemption that is found in our Lord Jesus Christ alone. Today, we meet Noah and his sons just after they have exited the ark, which they entered on account of the Flood, which destroyed all but eight souls, because the wickedness of mankind had become too unbearable for God to tolerate.

This shows us the severity of sinfulness in God’s eyes, and the hatred He possesses on account of our sin. And as we heard yesterday, sin is not something we can shake from ourselves by our own doing. It clings to us and won’t let us go. On account of sin, our lifeblood has been taken from us; we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Therefore, our blood demands a payment for the life that has been taken from us; our Lord God demands a payment for the life that has been taken from us.

However, we can never repay the debt that is owed. It is impossible for us. But thanks be to God! For it is possible with our Lord God, Who has sent His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, into our flesh, to repay the debt of sin and death that He demands. He came so that He might fulfill the Law on our behalf, and suffer and die in our punishment. Therefore, by His own hand, He has fulfilled the requirement, and given us eternal life and salvation.

“And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” One of the heavy obligations given to the pastor, through Christ’s call to serve a particular congregation of Christ, is the responsibility to “retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent” (SC V). In certain cases, this will compel the pastor to excommunicate a member from the congregation and the fellowship of the Church.

Yet this is nothing less than a revealing of the true love of Christ – and the love of Christ’s servant of the Word – for the sinner. Yes, the noting of this person as one with which the Church will not keep company is an exercise of “tough love.” aimed at bringing shame upon the impenitent sinner to break his stony heart in repentance, so that he will receive the forgiveness of sins in faith. An excommunication is not intended to be permanent, but temporary. For this reason, the Apostle Paul charges the Church to go in mission to the one who has been removed from her fellowship and exhort him in brotherly love to repentance and back into faith, thereby bringing him back to the brotherhood, for now and forever!

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, Whose property it is always to have mercy, we most earnestly beseech Thee to visit with Thy fatherly correction all such have erred and gone astray from the truth of Thy holy Word and to bring them to a due sense of their error that they may again with hearty faith receive, and hold fast, Thine unchangeable truth; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Children are included in the Kingdom of God. Through Holy Baptism, God gives the Holy Spirit and every spiritual gift even to infants. By the working of His Spirit through the Word, taught in a simple way, children come to the knowledge of Jesus’ love and to faith in Him. Indeed, the children are the example of Christian faithfulness to which Christ directs all (Mk 10:15), for children receive the Word of God in simple faith, with minds unclouded by the worldly wisdom that so often confuses Christian adults.

Children are not only a vital part of the Church, but are a vital part of the Church’s mission. Even while they stand among the current congregation in her faithful receiving of the Word of God, the children stand as the next generation of the Church, preparing to carry on the apostolic tradition of baptizing infants, teaching little ones, and communing those who confess a mature Christian knowledge. God grant to His Church wisdom in reaching out to the little ones, that His Kingdom is extended in our generation, and in generations to come.

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who does will that not one of these little ones should perish and has sent Thine only Son to seek and to save that which was lost and through Him has said, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God,” most heartily we beseech Thee so to bless and govern the children of Thy Church by Thy Holy Spirit that they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of Thy Word; protect and defend them against all danger and harm, giving Thy holy angels charge over them; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

The beginning of the Church Year begins with the season of Advent—the season where we prepare for the three-fold coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, in Word and Sacrament, and at the Last Day. It would therefore seem appropriate that instead of the narrative of the Fall of mankind from the First Book of Moses, that we would rather here some text regarding our Lord’s coming.

But this is precisely the type of text we have. For at the Fall of mankind—at the point when all seems hopeless for Adam and Eve—our Lord God proclaims the coming of the Messiah; the One Who would bruise Satan’s head, by bruising His heel.

What an appropriate way to begin the New Church Year! We are reminded once again of our fallen condition, and are given the narrative of how we have inherited the original sin that dwells within each one of us. We are reminded that on account of this in-dwelling sin, there is a curse that hangs over us; a curse that we cannot shake from ourselves by our own doing or willing.

However, our Lord in His great mercy had planned before the foundation of the world to redeem us and all mankind from this curse, by crushing Satan through the death of His One and Only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; Whose birth we await. He came and dwelt in our flesh, so that He might lift the curse from off of us, and so that we might have eternal life with Him.

THE GOSPEL

St. Matthew 21:1–8 (NKJV)

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

“Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

THE COLLECT

Stir up, we beseech You, Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The faithful pastor – and the faithful in the congregation that he serves – must expect persecution in the world for such faithfulness. For the Evil One hates Christ, and works out his rage by seeking to destroy the one who brings Christ to the nations through Christ’s Word and Sacraments. St. Peter’s exhortation is well taken by any preacher and missionary of the Word: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pt 5:8).

“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.” The Apostle Paul knows that the same thing that brings persecution by the lion is what delivers from the lion’s mouth. Faithfully preaching in the Word of Christ, even in the season of the devil’s devouring of you on account of that preaching, is what ultimately delivers you. That lion might succeed in bringing hurt to your body like he did with Job, but He cannot reach your soul; even as the Lord strengthened Job’s faith, so He will strengthen your faith through this exercise and preserve you. In the end, God shall graciously honor such faithfulness with the crown of everlasting life, bestowed upon His faithful preacher of His Word -- and the faithful hearers who were blessed to hear it.

O Almighty God, Who by Thy Son, Jesus Christ, did give to Thy holy Apostles many excellent gifts and commanded them earnestly to feed Thy flock, make, we beseech Thee, all pastors diligently to preach Thy holy Word and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” This verse is more than a prophecy about the time of the end of the world. This is a Word of mission until that end. This is a word of encouragement to the Church to send forth laborers into the harvest until the very moment that the reapers come.

For This Word is a command of Christ: “this gospel . . . will be preached.” It is thus a charge given to His called and ordained servants to bring the Word and Sacraments of His Gospel into all the world. It is a commission given to His Church to give witness to all the nations concerning the Good News of this Gospel of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Jesus’ Name. And, like every other commandment that God gives, He Himself fulfills it. His Word does not return empty, but accomplishes His own purpose for it. He commands His Gospel be brought into the world until the end, on account of what He Himself will work through it unto the end. “For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel” (AC V). So He will do, unto a very blessed end!

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who desires not the death of the sinner, but would have all men to repent and live, hear our prayers for the heathen, take away iniquity from their hearts, and turn them from their idols unto the Living and True God and to Thine only Son; and gather them into Thy holy Church, to the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“Test the spirits, whether they are of God.” How does one test the spirits? By asking, “Do they confess that *“Jesus Christ has come in the flesh?”* The one who do not confess that the Lord Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is *“Antichrist.”* When we see just how few there are who are truly concerned with right teaching, and remaining faithful to the Lord’s Word, it can make one shudder. When we see how entrenched evil is in our society and the world; how those things which the Lord God clearly calls sin in His Holy Scriptures is made out to not be sin, it can be scary and intimidating. But the Apostle St. John in his epistle rescues us from these fears, for he states, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

God has overcome the devil, the world and our flesh. And because we have been baptized into the Lord Jesus, we are of God; therefore, we too have overcome them. Since we have been called by God out of death into life by our Holy Baptism, we hear the words of our Lord, Who proclaims to us that we are His children, and that no evil in this world can harm us. By this same token, we can discern who is not of God, for they do not listen to the teachings of the Church. Instead they speak as the world does. Therefore, as we prepare for our Lord’s coming in the flesh, let us stand fast to the pure teaching of the Lord God. Knowing that through His Word we are saved.

“God is greater than our heart.” What great words! Out of our hearts come all sorts of evil thoughts, words and deeds, and on account of our hearts we are condemned. But, *“God is greater than our hearts.”* Knowing our lost condition, He sent His One and Only Son into our flesh to bear our sin, and fulfill the Law perfectly for us. The Lord Jesus took on our flesh—our heart—and bore that heart to the cross, where it was pierced for our transgressions, and water and blood flowed out of His heart, even as sin and death, was poured out of our hearts. Therefore, our hearts no longer can condemn us, for they have been purified and sanctified on the cross of our Lord Jesus.

Therefore, since our hearts have been cleansed and made holy, our Heavenly Father has made us His children, so that, *“whatever we ask we receive from Him.”* St. John means here that when we ask for the Lord to strengthen our faith, or forgive us of our sins, or teach us to hope in our salvation, and not look at our sins, that the Lord God will indeed grant this unto us. The Lord does this by His Holy Spirit, Whom He pours out upon us through His Word and Sacraments. When we receive the means of grace, which bestow upon us the Holy Spirit, our faith is strengthened and renewed, so that we are filled with faith towards God and fervent love for our neighbor.

THE GOSPEL**Matthew 24:15-28 (NKJV)**

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

“But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.”

THE COLLECT

Almighty God, we beseech Thee, show Thy mercy unto Thy humble servants, that we who put no trust in our own merits may not be dealt with after the severity of Thy judgment, but according to Thy mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

A striking feature of prophetic utterances in general is the absence of the elements of time according to humans standards. Events that may be years and centuries apart are connected as though they would take place in one continuous action. The eternal God, who inspires prophecy, is not subject to time. Whatever happens, takes place before Him in one great Now. Another significant fact: Jesus connects the prophecies concerning Jerusalem and concerning the final judgment in such a way that they almost overlap. The judgment upon Jerusalem is not only a type of the last, great Judgment Day, but the judgment of the world has, in a way, begun with the fall of Jerusalem.—There are solemn lessons contained in this chapter. When the day which is destined to be the last day of this world dawns, must unusual and terrible signs will appear. The sun will be darkened, the moon will lose her splendor, the stars will fall from the sky, the powers which control the heavens will be agitated, all the laws of nature will be overthrown. No ordinary eclipses, shooting stars, meteors here, that are merely acting in accordance with nature's laws; here is chaos, here is the subverting of all the powers that have held the universe in its accustomed path. The same Creator that formed the heavens and framed the laws which regulate the great machinery of creation will at that time recall the laws, and deal with the universe according to His further plan and will. And then, amid the uproar of the elements and the quaking of the heavens, the great sign, the Son of Man Himself, will appear in the sky, clothed with His eternal power and majesty. The former despised Nazarene, the Son of Man in His humiliation, will show that His claim of supernatural endowments were only too well founded. Then all the tribes, all the nations of the earth, shall wail and lament, as the Judge comes in the clouds of the sky, with power and much glory. And there will be the sound of a mighty trumpet, and the angels will be sent out as His messengers to collect those who are His own in faith.

—P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*

There are two paths: lawlessness or purity. “*Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.*” “*Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*” The first path is the way of works; either trusting that one's works will save him or, believing that freedom from sin means that one may live according to the evil desires of one's own heart, and that he may do whatever pleases him without any consequence. The second path is the path of grace; trusting in our Lord and His works on our behalf for our salvation. Those who live according to grace, can see “what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us,” for we see that we are His children, and that He loves us very much, in spite of our sin.

This is why the Apostle St. John speaks the way he does in this pericope, so that those who may be on the first path, may turn and repent, and hope in the Lord Jesus for salvation. For St. John states that, “*Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.*” And, “*He who sins is of the devil.*” At first glance these are scary words for poor, miserable sinners, for we daily sin much, and immediately we think upon reading this, “Uh, oh! I'm in trouble.” Until we remember what St. John wrote earlier in his epistle, that Christ dwells in us, so that by His grace, we are pure and without sin. For His pure works abide in us, and as we hope in His works, and what He suffered for us, we remain pure and undefiled. Therefore, on account of Christ's works, we “*can-not sin.*”

“It is the last hour.” This is both good news and bad news. It is good news, for it surely means that our Lord’s return is soon here. However, it is also bad news, for it means that as the Last Day approaches, which brings our Lord Jesus to us, it also means that the Antichrist is coming, even as there are now many antichrists within the world, who deny the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle St. John tells us that these antichrists had their beginning in the Church. But, on account of their false teachings, they were exposed as ones who did not belong within the Church. This is how we also can tell who does not belong to the Church of God: by their denial that the Lord Jesus is the One and Only Anointed One of the Father; that He and the Father are one; or those who deny the Father and the Son altogether. These are the ones who are antichrists.

“Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning” at your Holy Baptism. At your Holy Baptism, you received an anointing from the Holy One. You were made a child of God, and an heir of the Kingdom of God. St. John states that this anointing *“teaches you concerning all things.”* That means that when you were baptized, you were baptized into all truth, so that all falsehood within you was removed. And because the falsehood and lies of the devil, the world, and your flesh were removed, you were granted a promise—the promise of eternal life; an eternal life that waits expectantly for our Lord’s return on the Last Day.

V. 31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, V. 32. I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. V. 33. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at His doctrine.

Christ’s manner implies a censure of their reading the books of Moses without understanding: Ye are ignorant of the very books which ye profess to hold sacred, in which the Lord speaks directly to you. It was on Mount Horeb that the Lord said these words to Moses, Ex. 3:6, 16. If the patriarchs were dead, body and soul, if they were annihilated and no longer in existence, how could God call Himself their God, He who is the God of the living only? The resurrected dead, according to their souls, live with God in heaven; they are truly alive, and on the last day their souls will be reunited with the body ... No wonder the people, the many that crowded around the disputing parties were very much surprised at this bit of clear doctrine. “Behold, who would have thought that in these short, simple, common words so much would be contained, and would yield such a fine, rich sermon, yea, a great and mighty book, which could be derived therefrom. Which words they had known well, and yet had not believed that in the entire books of Moses a single word concerning the resurrection of the dead was to be found; for which reason they adhered to Moses only, and repudiated the prophets, though these took all their sermons on the chief articles of Christ’s faith from Moses.”

—P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*

There were, it seems, false apostles or very ignorant members at Corinth, men that claimed there was no resurrection of the dead. St. Paul, therefore, includes a detailed defense and exposition of the doctrine in his letter. The section is the crowning glory of the epistle, a demonstration of the truth of a future resurrection. The doubt which the apostle here combats is one that strikes at the root of Christianity, which concerns the fundamental fact of the Gospel-truth. In a burst of lofty and sustained eloquence the patient teacher again gives the Corinthians instructions concerning the first things, the doctrine without which Christianity would be a riddle: But I make known to you, I declare to you, brethren, the Gospel which I proclaimed to you. The words convey a measure of censure, of blame, that it should have become necessary for him so soon to repeat some information which belonged to the fundamental tenets of their faith. Mark that Paul here, as elsewhere, does not refer his readers to human feelings or opinions, but to a fixed fund of Christian knowledge, to the Gospel, the good news of the redemption of mankind as it was being carried out into the world by all the apostles. Of this Gospel he says: Which also you received, in which also you stand fast, through which also you are being saved. These are the steps in Christian life: Faith is kindled in the heart, the Gospel news is accepted; faith continues in the heart, the believer places all his hope for salvation in the Gospel day by day, and thus the benefits of the Gospel, being continuous, are also progressive, salvation is altogether certain to the believer, he has its benefits, he enjoys them day by day. The Gospel is the means of our salvation; it is the beginning, middle, and end of our redemption unto eternal life, since it appropriates to us the riches of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

—P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*

“Certain men have crept in unnoticed.” This is how the devil works against the Church of God until the Lord Jesus comes again in His glory. He sends into the Church false teachers who by appearance of right and good, and with flattering lips, lead some away into sin and unbelief; denying the Lord Jesus as God, and claiming that that which God calls sin is not sin. Against these false teachers, we must *“contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”* What does this mean? It means pulling those false teachers, and the ones who follow them, out of the fire into which they have fallen by upholding and teaching the truth, that is, the doctrines that we have received from our forefathers, which they received from the Apostles. Those who refuse to repent of their false teaching must be put out of the Church; marked out for destruction by the Lord God.

Therefore, let us remember the words spoken through the Apostles, and not be *“grumblers, complainers, walking according to [our] own lusts; [who] mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.”* Instead, let us repent of these sins, listen to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and believe on Him, Who sends into us through His Word, the Holy Spirit, Who creates in us faith and life. And having been sustained in faith, we see clearly the Heavenly Father’s mercy toward us, and how He disregards our sins, on account of His Son’s suffering and death on the cross. But instead gathers us to Himself, into one people.

Today, the Apostle St. Peter warns us not to be drawn away by the cares and lies of the world. For the world will say that since the Lord has not come after almost 2,000 years, and, in their estimation, His presence is not seen within the world, that our Lord Jesus is not coming back, in fact, according to the world, He doesn't and never existed. St. Peter reveals that the true reason for them saying this, is that they want to follow the evil desires of their own heart and chase after the gods of their own choosing, which are themselves.

Therefore, the blessed St. Peter gives us comfort and assurance that our Lord is indeed coming again. God promised to destroy the earth in Noah's days with a flood, and even though there were many years between the promise and the carrying out of the promise, the flood still happened. The same was true of our Lord's first coming in the flesh. The Israelites waited for centuries for the promise to be fulfilled, and then like a thief in the night, the Lord God revealed Himself in our flesh, to save us from sin and death by His perfect obedience and His suffering and death. The Lord is patient, waiting for just the right time for the harvest to be ready for harvesting. He is patient with us and the world as well, giving ample opportunity to repent, and believe on Him.

The sacred writer now wishes to emphasize the need of this faithfulness for obtaining the prize, and to that end refers to the journey of the children of Israel through the desert and some of the principal incidents of the forty years included in that journey. He quotes Ps. 95:7–11, stating at the same time that it was the Holy Ghost to whom the words there written are to be ascribed as the real Author. The passage gives a reason for his earnest warning: Today, when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the provocation (Meribah), as on the day of temptation (Massah) in the wilderness. The prophets refers to the incident related Ex. 17:1–7; Num. 20:1–13, and the writer of our letter quotes the Greek translation of the Hebrew words which are probably the proper nouns of the station in the wilderness where the people rebelled. Their conduct at that time was provoking to the Lord; it challenged His wrath, it demanded His punishment. For, as the quotation continues: Where your fathers tested Me, putting Me to a proof, and saw My works forty years. It is a bitter complaint which the Lord here voices. The children of Israel, by their unruly behavior, put the Lord to a trial, to a proof, just as though they wanted to satisfy themselves as to the length of time that they could oppose His will. The entire history of the journey through the wilderness presents practically a succession of incidents of a nature calculated to provoke the wrath of the Lord. Although He performed miracles of goodness and mercy and judgment before their eyes during all that time with the intention of winning them to Himself, yet they remained a stubborn and rebellion generation.

—P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*

Since he was the father of the Old Testament believers, the example of Abraham is treated at length, no fewer than five points in which his faith stood out prominently being given in this chapter: By faith Abraham, being called to go forth to a place which he was destined to receive as an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing where he was going. Gen. 12:1–4. When the Lord issued His special call to Abraham, the latter was living with his father Terah at Haran. The call of God influenced his heart and mind to such an extent that he was no longer identified in any manner with the idolatry practised in his father's house, and that his faith wrought in him a strong obedience to the call of the Lord. It may not have been an easy matter for Abraham, who at that time was already seventy-five years old and possessed great wealth, to leave the home of his father for an unknown country, where, moreover, idolatry was practiced just as badly as in Mesopotamia. But his faith in the promise of the Messiah gave him power to believe also the promise concerning the land of his inheritance on earth.

Abraham's faith was put to a severe test at this time: By faith he sojourned in the Land of Promise as in a foreign country, living in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he was waiting for the city having foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

—P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*

THE GOSPEL**St. Matthew 25:1–13 (NKJV)**

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight a cry was heard: "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."

But the wise answered, saying, "No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves."

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us!"

But he answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you."

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

THE COLLECT

Absolve, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy people from their offenses, that from the bonds of our sins which by reason of our frailty we have brought upon us we may be delivered by Thy bountiful goodness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end.

“v. 1b. *Who shall privily bring in destructive heresies.*”

He calls them destructive heresies, sects, or classes and orders, because whoever is persuaded into them is already lost. These they shall secretly bring in, he says, not that they shall preach that the Gospel and the Holy Scriptures are false, for that would work quite against them, but the names, God, Christ, faith, church, baptism, sacrament, they still hold, and suffer to continue. But under these names they bring forward and set up something entirely different. For there is a great difference, whether I say a man preaches against this doctrine or privily introduces other ideas along with it. When I preach, for example, that Christ is the Son of God and true man, and whoever believes on Him shall be saved, that is right preaching and true Gospel. But if one preaches that Christ is not the Son of God, nor true man, moreover that faith does not save, it is in plain contradiction of it. Of this Peter does not speak, for this is what our schools, priests and monks do not attempt, but he speaks of those associated doctrines which they introduce through the true doctrine. As when they speak thus: It is true that Christ is real God and real man; that He died for our sins, and no one can be saved who does not believe him, but that belongs only to the common state of ordinary Christians. We wish however to set up a more complete order, in which men shall vow chastity, poverty and obedience, as well as fast, endow institutions, etc. Whoever does this shall go full tide up to heaven. Where men now preach and hear such things as that there is nothing better and more saving than virginity and obedience, and that the monk and the priests are a higher and more perfect calling than the ordinary Christian person, there is nothing said against the pure Christian doctrine directly, nor are faith and baptism denied, nor that Christ is the Savior. But they privately introduce such doctrines along with these as to lead men away from the right path, that they build upon themselves and their works, and hold nothing more in regard to Christ than these words: We believe that Christ is the Son of God, and man; that He died and rose again, that He is the Savior of the world, etc. But they repose no trust and confidence in Him, for if they did that they would not rest an hour upon themselves.”

Martin Luther, *Annotations on the Epistles of Peter*
(trans. by John N. Lenker, 1904)

Here is another reason for the entire appeal and warning as contained in this chapter, namely, the fact that grace is the compelling motive in the Christian's life, and not fear: For you have not approached to the mountain that can be touched and burns with fire, to darkness and gloom and hurricane, and to the sound of a trumpet and to a voice sounding in words, which they that heard earnestly begged that further speech might not be added to them. The reference is evidently to the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, Ex. 19; Deut. 4. That was a solemn, a fearful occasion, for the mountain itself was burning with fire, Deut. 4:11, and yet the rest of the country in the neighborhood was covered with a misty gloom, with a heavy darkness, while a stormwind having the proportions of a hurricane made every heart quake, Deut. 4:11; 5:22. ...

Fortunate are the Christians that they are no longer under the Law, the very giving of which struck abject terror into the hearts of a whole nation: But you have drawn near to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the perfected righteous, and to the Mediator of a new covenant, Jesus, and to the blood of sprinkling, whose message is more excellent than Abel's.

—P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*

THE GOSPEL

St. Matthew 25:31-46 (NKJV)

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

“Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’

“Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

THE COLLECT

O God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Thy Holy Spirit that, being ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Thy just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with Thee forever hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who liveth and reigneth, with thee and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

“v. 4b. That through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust.”

This we have, Peter says, through the power of faith, namely that we are partakers of and enjoy the fellowship and communion with the divine nature. This is a passage the like of which is not found in the New and Old Testaments; although it is a small matter with unbelievers that we should have fellowship with the very divine nature itself. But what is the nature of God? It is eternal righteousness, wisdom, eternal life, peace, joy and happiness, and everything good that can be named. Now whoever becomes a partaker of the nature of God, receives all this, namely, he lives forever, possesses endless peace, pleasure and joy, and is sincere, pure, just and almighty against Satan, sin and death. Therefore Peter will say: As impossible as it is to separate eternal life and eternal truth from the nature of God, just so impossible is it to separate them from you. Whatever one does to you, he must do to Him, for whoever will crush a Christian must crush God.

All this is contained in the words, “the divine nature”; and Peter chose these words for the purpose to include all in them; and it is truly a great thing if one believe it. But, as I said above, this is merely instruction in which Peter does not lay the foundation of faith; but paints forth what great and rich treasures we receive through faith; therefore he says, all that will you possess, if you so live as to prove your faith by your life, that you have escaped from worldly lust.

Martin Luther, *Annotations on the Epistles of Peter*
(trans. by John N. Lenker, 1904)

“v. 12. *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you.*”

That is a mode of speech not common in our language. But Peter uses this very phraseology, in order to remind us of that concerning which the holy Scriptures speak. For Scripture is accustomed to speak of suffering as though it were a furnace full of fire and heat. Peter has spoken in the same manner above in 1 Peter. 1:7; “That the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire.” We may also read in the prophet Isaiah, 48:10, where God says: “I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction”; and Ps. 17:3, “With fire hast thou tried me”; and Ps. 26:2, “Examine me, O Jehovah, and prove me; try my heart and my mind”; also Ps. 66:12, “We went through fire and through water.” Thus the Scriptures are accustomed to call suffering “going through fire,” or “a testing by fire.” Peter’s conclusion is that we should not allow ourselves to be surprised, or to think it strange and wonderful that the heat or fire should meet us, by which we are tried just as gold is melted in the fire.

When faith begins, God does not neglect it; He lays the holy Cross upon our back in order to strengthen us and make our faith mighty. The holy Gospel is a powerful word, therefore it cannot enter upon its work without opposition, and no one can be sure that it possesses such power, but he who has experienced it. Where suffering and the Cross are, there its power may be shown and exercised. It is a living Word, and therefore it must exercise all its energy in the time of death.

Martin Luther, *Annotations on the Epistles of Peter*
(trans. by John N. Lenker, 1904)

“v. 2a. *According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*”

Peter says, they are elected. How? Not by themselves, but according to the order or purpose of God. For we will not be able to raise ourselves to heaven nor create faith in ourselves. God will not permit all persons to enter heaven; He will very definitely identify His own. Here the human doctrine of free will and of our own ability avails nothing any longer. It does not depend upon our will but upon the will and election of God.

This means that you are chosen, you have not obtained it through your own strength, work or merit, for the treasure is too great, and all the holiness and righteousness of mankind far too worthless to obtain it; moreover you were heathen, knew nothing of God, had no hope and served dumb idols. Therefore, without any assistance on your part, out of pure grace you have come to such inexpressible glory, namely, only in the way that God the Father appointed you to it from eternity. Thus he presents the foreknowledge of God in a very beautiful and comforting light, as if he should have said: You are chosen and you will indeed remain so, for God who foreknew you is sufficiently strong and certain that His foreknowledge cannot fail Him, nevertheless so far as you believe His promise and esteem Him as the true God.

From this we can in brief draw the teaching that this foreknowledge does not rest upon our worthiness and merit, as the sophists hold, for then Satan could every moment make it doubtful and overthrow it; but it rests in the hand of God, and is founded upon His mercy, which is unchangeable and eternal; consequently it is called the foreknowledge of God, and therefore it is certain and cannot fail.

Martin Luther, *Annotations on the Epistles of Peter*
(trans. by John N. Lenker, 1904)

“v. 19b. *As of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*”

Here Peter however expounds the Scriptures, for this is a powerful, rich Epistle, although it is short. After speaking of their vain manner of life handed down from the fathers, he makes use of a number of passages in the prophets, as in Jeremiah 16:19: “The nations shall come from the ends of the earth, and shall say, our fathers have inherited nought but lies”; as if Peter should say: The prophets also have proclaimed that the heathen should be redeemed from the traditions of the fathers through the precious blood of Christ. Thus will he here also point us to the Scriptures, when he says: “You are redeemed through the blood of Christ as of an innocent and spotless lamb,” and explains that which is written in the prophets and in Moses, for example, that in Is. 53:7: As a lamb he is led to the slaughter; also the figure in Ex. 12:2f. of the Passover or Easter Lamb. All this he explains here and says, Christ is the spotless and innocent lamb, through which, as it stands written in Ex. 12:5, it shall be without blemish, is signified that Christ’s blood was shed for our sins.

Martin Luther, *Annotations on the Epistles of Peter*
(trans. by John N. Lenker, 1904)

“v. 2. *That ye no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.*”

We should hereafter, as long as we live upon the earth, take the flesh captive by virtue of the Cross and sufferings of Christ, and bring it under control, so that we live not like the unbelievers, who know nothing of God, never inquire for His word, and continue to live in their lusts without any fear of God, as if this life were to last forever and God would never hold judgment and punish their sins. But we should now lead an honorable, holy life as becometh the children of God, and apply ourselves with all earnestness to do the will of our heavenly Father; not that we may thereby merit anything, for our eternal inheritance Christ has acquired for us without any merit or assistance on our part; but in order that God may thereby be praised and our neighbor served.

We should henceforth, as long as we live, hold the flesh captive through the Cross and by mortifying the flesh so as to do that which pleases God, and not with the idea that we should or could deserve anything by it. “Not in the flesh to the lusts of men,” says he; namely, we should not do that to which others tempt us; for we are not to be conformed to this world, as Paul says, Rom. 12:2. What the world demands of us we must avoid.

Martin Luther, *Annotations on the Epistles of Peter*
(trans. by John N. Lenker, 1904)