

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Luke the twenty-first chapter beginning at the twenty-fifth verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; ²⁶ "men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. ²⁷ "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near." ²⁹ Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ "When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. ³¹ "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the

kingdom of God is near. ³² "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. ³³ "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. ³⁴ "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. ³⁵ "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray that you would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

The season of Advent, just like the End Times, can be a rather scary time. Just the texts alone are enough to make even stalwart Christians not want to read their Bibles nor come to church. Last week we heard how in Advent the

law is used like a hammer to crush our hearts, so that they become fleshy hearts. Well with the text before us today there is no letting up. In this text, Jesus is talking to His disciples about the end of the world and the signs that will proceed it.

The sun, moon, and stars are darkened, distress (i.e. wars) in nations, the waves and the seas are foaming and in great tumult, men's hearts are failing from fear, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken... This could be a movie all unto itself and I do not think that we have the computer power or imagination to try and capture this picture or this image. Jesus tells us that at the end of the world there is going to be a lot going on... and sometimes it reminds us of what is going on outside our doors even today. A rise in viewing of eclipses, especially with worldwide media, wars are constantly around us, the seas are going south according to some in the environmental movement, men's hearts fail all the time (literally and figuratively), and the sky itself is falling (or at least satellites are). We are living in the End Times... and all mankind has been living in

these times since Jesus Christ ascended to heaven.

It is with this notion of signs and wonders proceeding important events that we will turn our attention today. As we study, not only our text, but the Bible as a whole we will see that there have been great signs and wonders that are very applicable to this time of year, Advent. Dear friends in Christ, every day that we live on this side of heaven, we can be sure of one thing: ***Our Redemption is drawing near.***

This season of Advent, at least in the northern hemisphere, is usually a dreary one. Cold and dank days. Wind that would drive even the most hardened "man's man" inside. The dark that just seems to be around us constantly. Even without looking too far into our text we can almost see some of the fulfillment of Christ's words just by looking around us. Everything seems to be getting ready for the End.

However, there are still those who think that we are crazy for believing in this kind of stuff. There are those who look around at the world

and come up with an excuse or rationale for everything that is going on: more eclipses because of the media coverage, more war because of the media coverage, more failing hearts because of all that is going on around us... and the media coverage. Now, no, we are not here to blame the media, but so often all the warnings that God has placed into His word are dismissed because of natural phenomena or because of the additional coverage of an event. As Martin Luther points out, "As a result Aristotle, a blind heathen, teaches and rules Christians more than Christ does." Aristotle, a philosopher, a "smart guy," and in the same vain all those "smart guys" are pulling us further and further from God's Word, and we are going happily with them. Instead of seeing the things of the world as the sign of the "end," we, with so many others, write them off as a typical event. But what if they aren't?

A classic example of this took place about 2000 years ago. A ruler was so full of himself that he paid no heed to any warnings or news that was coming to him. In fact, he had decided that he was not going to listen to God anymore,

because he had everything he wanted. His name was Herod. And if you remember right, he had to call together a bunch of his own "wise men" to tell him that some pagans had been paying attention better than he had.

Those pagans, they are the "wise men" from the story that we have come to know as our Nativity story. We usually say that there were three wise men, maybe kings, who lived far away from Israel. And what brought them to Israel... a star. They were paying attention to the stars, the tokens (as Luther puts it) that God had placed in the world to announce something special to the people.

King Herod, a Jew, God's chosen people, did not know that his Savior was being born. Wise men from the east, who had not worshipped God and were not His chosen people, came to pay homage to the king who was being born... all because they saw a star and trusted in the "Word of God" that they had heard.

And I have to wonder if we, in our present day and age, and in our present level of "smarts"...

would we be more Herod or would we be more Wise men?

At the very beginning God made a promise to our first parents. When they had sinned and broken His law, instead of sending them straight to hell, He promised them a Savior. “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” (Gen 3:15), God’s first promise was for a Savior from the sin committed. How will we know this Savior? Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” Immanuel, God with us. God Himself would be with us and would save us from our sin. Isaiah also said, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). God would come Himself to save us from our sins that we committed. And where should we look for Him, and this is where Herod’s men

turned, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting... and he shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth” (Micah 5:2,4). He will be born in Bethlehem, in Judah and He will rule not only Israel but all the world. And though born in Israel, “When Israel was a child, I loved Him, and out of Egypt I called My Son” (Hosea 11:1). God knew about the trip to Egypt that His Son Jesus and His family would have to endure. All of these prophecies were staring Herod in the face... if he were a good Jew he knew them. He knew the Savior was coming and all he had to do was wait and watch... but he didn’t. He let his heart get bogged down with drinking and carousing and the cares of this life. His Savior was coming and he was not watching for Him.

And the same thing, I pray, need not be true for us. Our Savior is coming. The Savior who was

born of Mary, of a woman, who was born in Bethlehem in Judah. Our Savior who is God Himself and thus would rule the world from beginning to end. Our Savior, who lived the perfect life for us, when we could not. Our Savior, who died on the cross for all of our sins, to make full atonement for them. Our Savior who rose three days later to proclaim that His life, death, and resurrection are sufficient for all people.

And it is through faith in all that Jesus Christ, our Savior, has done that we have heaven waiting for us when this life is over.

When it comes to our Savior, we do not need to look for signs, for our Savior has already come. Rather, in Advent, we prepare for the first coming of our Savior in His birth... but we also continue to prepare for His second coming at the end of days... and for this second coming we can indeed watch the signs as they unfold all around us.

However, as the wars continue, as the sun, moon, and stars continue on their paths, as men

become faint of heart from fear, and as all the other signs continue to come... we can heed the words of Christ, "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near." Instead of cowering in fear and worrying ourselves, let us look forward to the coming of Christ... both His first coming which we will celebrate soon, and His second coming which we will be glad to see for it means our redemption is here.

Dear friends in Christ, let us again hear Jesus' parable for us, "Then He spoke to them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.'" Christ tells us that we can look at the times and see that the End is near, and I do not suppose that any of us would deny this fact.

However Jesus wants to leave us with an even more important message, “His word will not fail.” Though the word goes to pot and everyone hates everyone else... Jesus’ words will not fail. Jesus promises to love all of His faithful children and to bring them home to Himself. This is a promise of God, just like all the others He makes, that we can base our hope on.

And as the end draws near... as our Savior draws nearer to us... Thank God that *our redemption draws near.*

Thanks be to God. Amen.