

There was once a woman who prayed for her child to become a Christian for many years. Longer than some of you have been alive. It is longer than some of us have been married. It is longer than a few of our clothing garments.

She waited for seventeen years. Praying fervently for her son. Finally, he saw the light and became a Christian. Her hope was fulfilled and he went on to be one of the most influential theologians of Christian history. Her name was Saint Monica. His name was Saint Augustine.¹

The Gospel of Luke is about the already not yet aspect of Christianity. Luke is a two part book.² The second part is the Book of Acts. It was written by Luke, who was an apostle of Paul, yet of the gentile background. Luke's focus is less on historical Jewish facts as we would think of them and more on the truth of who Jesus was: the Messiah.³ God's incarnate one who was brought to Earth. This is the gospel of grace.⁴

The first advent of Sunday is about grace overcoming the difficulties of our lives. Today, Jesus reminds his disciples that he is with them and he will come again. This means that Jesus must go away, at least for a while. This is why we are called to be the light to each other.

Advent is a penitential season. A time for reflection on ourselves and others. Advent is a time to look at what we do well and see how our relationship with God can deepen.

Luke's gospel⁵ has a lot to say about changing times. Often in the bible, end time language and parables guided people through perilous times. Today Jesus taught the parable of the fig tree. He said to look for the signs for when Jesus will come back. During Advent, we prepare our hearts to receive the Christ child. We can do this by sharing small gifts of love such as a gift bag for NAAM. Perhaps it is helping to decorate the church and seeing the beauty to celebrate the coming of Christ. Perhaps it is filling a box for a Seafarer.⁶

Christ is coming: then and now. This sounds as though it is the title of an apocalypse action movie with Chris Pratt. The coming of Christ is about what is happening "behind and beyond history."⁷ This is much like doing a full scan of our Christian history. A reminder of the heart of what our relationship with God is; and this can be painful. It is a deep exploration, which means this will take a great deal of time.

¹ To read more about Saint Monica go to

<https://www.catholiccompany.com/magazine/patron-for-patience-st-monica-5876#> . My grandmother used to love the Catholic Company and the google algorithm occasionally brings me updates from them. I learned more about St. Augustine in my Anglican Studies class. Dr. Nathan Jennings encouraged us to re-read St. Augustine of Hippo. To read more about him, please see *The Confessions of St. Augustine*.

² Fr. Roman wrote an excellent blog introducing the Gospel of Luke. In case the pies and family were consuming your time (as they were mine), I gave you a taste of what he said in my sermon.

³ <https://saintdunstans.org/fr-romans-blog/the-year-of-luke/>

⁴ Be alert! Waiting in hopeful anticipation then and now of Christ's unexpected coming. Waiting is hard. It means we have to hope without a clear picture of what will happen.

⁵ Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. Some exegetical notes: uite a bit of apocalyptic discourse, both in chapters 8–11 with a description of signs of the end time, to the next seven chapters (12–19), which was a time of testimony before the end. In chapters 20-24, the "fall of Jerusalem" is recounted. And then Jesus tells the disciples that the Son of man is coming.

⁶ Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. p.245

⁷ Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

We can look at the parable of the fig tree and know that exploring our past can help us better understand the future. Jesus says, “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.”⁸ Jesus is telling us to look around and see the signs. You have perhaps seen signs of Christmas in your community: lights on houses, Christmas trees opening, invitations to parties. Christmas is coming and with it a festive celebration of Christ.

As most of you know by now, I am a fairly orderly person. I enjoy time tables and love excel spreadsheets. God does not work in a linear fashion of time. God and Christ think in terms of all creation.⁹

Our future sins have already been forgiven. Our future joys are celebrated. Christ has come and will come again is true at the same moment.

This is about what we see in the Eucharistic prayer, in some ways we are communing with the saints past and present.

This is frightening. We, as Christians, are not privy to the plans of our Creator. It is a bit like playing a blindfolded game. We have to trust that God will lead us beside the still waters. We have to move beside the valley of shadows, all while waiting for Christ to come. In this season of advent, we are waiting for Christ’s birth as well as his return.

Our text today emphasizes restoration

The church provides two liturgical opportunities for this: Advent and Lent. These seasons of reflection allow us to strengthen ourselves to better see Christ in new ways. Once we are strengthened we are more full examples of Christ’s light.

As Paul writes, “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.”¹⁰

How can we bring a church to others.¹¹

We often forget that Christ is a great leader. A fiery leader. He is a fierce advocate who calls each of us to reflect. This time of restoration and reflection during Advent helps us prepare for Christ’s coming again.

Jesus gives us something to do while we wait - and I do not mean finding a game to play on our iphone, or looking at the gossip column.

Instead, our call is to make disciples of all in our midst. Help everyone understand that though Jesus’ message is a harsh one, it is also one of comfort. It is for everyone. Luke was a gentile writer for a community made up of gentiles. This means he could be saved in a way that previously only the Jews were thought to be saved.

This is good news. The birth of Christ is good news.¹² And yet, we do not act at this time in simple memory of what happened over 2,000 years ago.

⁸ Luke 21:29-30

⁹ Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. Notes about the Greek words The time Jesus operates in is different from the time we think of, this is an issue of Chronos v. Kairos

¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 3:10

¹¹ How can we bring the true version of Christ to our American Empire? I think it would upset so many people: Those on the left might be upset by the idea of a call to morality against some of the teachings. Those on the right might be upset by some of the teachings of Christ. Those in the middle would be upset by Jesus’s call to actions.

¹² West, A. (2021). “Commentary on Luke 21:25-36”

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-advent-3/commentary-on-luke-2125-36-5>

In the context of the gospel, theologian N.T. Wright notes, “times of great crisis are coming in which the failure of Israel in general and Jerusalem in particular to repent and follow the kingdom way advocated by Jesus would have its disastrous result. The Romans would come (they are not mentioned by name, but if anyone was likely to surround Jerusalem with armies it was surely them) and would lay siege to the city.”¹³ The world of the disciples' descendants is being flipped upside down. People will leave Jerusalem. The disciples must leave Jerusalem while there is still time. The faithful will not win, the Pagans will “flatten” the city.

Does this sound familiar? Does it sound as if a secular world has been taken over their lives?

The readings today reflect a note from Daniel on the restoration after the end of a reign of a particularly controlling king.¹⁴ We know that freedom to worship and find Christ is not a reality in many places. During this advent season we await the birth of Christ as well as the coming again of Christ to end all inequity in the world.

Waiting is a chore. Anyone who has had to wait for something they love knows this: they know that waiting for a beloved one to arrive from a trip. Or perhaps to accomplish a goal is, indeed, a difficulty. Yet, they also know the wait is worth it.¹⁵ We know that the gift of the Christ child is worth it.

In the same way, we are waiting. Each of you is studying the scriptures of the Advent season. We are doing devotionals. Together, we light the advent candle and know that we are waiting for Christ here and now as well as Christ in the future. Together, we will, “Be alert at all times, praying that we may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”¹⁶ Together, we will wait for Christ. Together, we will prepare for Christ’s coming again. Amen.

¹³ Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK. pp.253-259

¹⁴ The world today is full of ones who rule our life, yes, that may include the government. It could also include a controlling friend. A tyrannical workplace. Those in recent memory have seen the overthrowing of slavery, the defeat of the Nazis in Germany, the end of various dictatorships, and apartheid stopped. The Lord can overcome many rulers, they look vastly different in different contexts.

¹⁵ An example of waiting is my husband, David. My husband waited for an entire, I imagine agonizing, year to make the varsity baseball team. During that time, each day, he worked with a personal baseball coach on his batting and catching skills. He ran. He drank protein shakes. He lifted. He studied. Finally, at the end he made the team at Clements High School in Sugar Land. From there, he went on to play in college.

¹⁶ Luke 21:36