

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

Last week, the First Sunday of Advent we heard the unusual word eschatology that refers to the end times. I mention this because someone reminded me just how unusual it was because they never heard the word before. And now this week another odd sort of word that is not very common in our everyday language appears, not in our lessons, rather it accompanies the definitions and translations of terms that have to do with the meaning of Advent.

Of course, I am certain you all have heard that the word Advent is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming” or “arrival.” But this word *adventus* is a translation of the Greek term *Parousia*, which is a term used when referring to the second coming of Christ.

I mention this because, in the early church, the season of Advent was very much like Lent, it was a season of preparation for the baptism of new Christians at the January feast of Epiphany, or baptisms took place at Christ’s baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, or his first miracle at wedding feast in Cana. And like Lent, *adventus* was a season of preparation where Christians would spend 40 days in penance, prayer, and fasting to prepare for this celebration of baptism; originally, there was little connection between Advent and Christmas. But by the 6th century, the Roman Church had tied Advent to the coming of Christ. But the “coming” they had in mind was not Christ’s first coming in the manger in Bethlehem, but his second coming in the clouds as the judge of the world...this is called the *Parousia*. It was not until the Middle Ages that the Advent season was explicitly linked to Christ’s first coming at Christmas.

So today after all the history and change, during Advent, we look back upon Christ’s coming in celebration while at the same time we also look forward in eager anticipation to the *Parousia*...the coming of Christ’s kingdom when he returns for his people. So today, we await, eagerly and expectantly...NOT so much for Christmas, but the *Parousia* the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.¹ We await, eagerly and expectantly for the time when:

⁶...all flesh shall see the salvation of God. (Luke 3:6)

Like so many things about the Word of God along with the liturgy and the liturgical seasons that can take on a broader view when they are parsed out in detail, this simple line, “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” can give us an improved understanding when looking past the English words and digging into Luke’s intention within the context of this Gospel. All shall *perceive or experience* God bringing salvation is how this is parsed out from the Greek.

This type of visual language is very evident in Luke and Acts. But the term “see” in Luke is like these other terms I mentioned, seeing means much more in this particular Gospel. Luke, when using this term, is saying that all things will perceive, will understand, will recognize, or all things will experience the salvation coming from God. Listen to this passage from Luke with this understanding when the angel appears to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock on that glorious night we hear the angel say,

‘Do not be afraid; for see (perceive, understand, recognize, or experience) —I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people, (Luke 2:10)

¹ This sermon opening was adapted from this article at: <https://www.keylife.org/articles/what-is-advent>

When the parents of Jesus appear before Simeon in the temple we hear Simeon's response:
for my eyes have seen (perceived, understood, recognized, or experienced) your salvation,
(Luke 2:30)

Jesus when teaching a parable about a blind person leading a blind person listen again to Luke's intention:

Why do you see...or why do you (*think you understand*) the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, "Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye", when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye. (Luke 6:41-412)

Things are NOT always the way we think they should be...and this can be especially true when reading Holy Scripture. I think when it comes to Holy Scripture or our faith, and how we understand them to be and to work in our lives, we all suffer some loss of vision. We suffer because of the logs of our misunderstandings that are in our eyes, and these "logs" of misunderstanding hinder our religious imaginations, and end up building walls around our Christian faith, our Christian understanding, and our Christian ethic or piety.

We are in that time of Advent where we hear so much about John the Baptist and his cry of repentance. But this too is much like the term "see" and Luke's use of visual language in this Gospel. By our understanding, when we hear the word "repentance," we look into our safely sheltered understanding of repentance. Because of all that is taking place in the world around us, we hear and we interpret John telling the world to turn your life around, make the paths in your life straight, stop doing bad things and straighten out and do good.² And from our enclosed understandings...we want the world out there to turn their lives around and do good, and do so by our standards, by what we consider to be good.

Repentance is all that...and yes, it does mean to literally turn around but in this context of Luke's visual language, repentance is more about recognizing, rather, it is perceiving, understanding, or experiencing what is happening within ourselves, as we go about our lives in this world. It is about seeing...perceiving, recognizing, or experiencing new perspectives or adopting new understandings...but most of all, repentance in this context is about perceiving, understanding, and recognizing the truth about ourselves, seeing what is going on around us and seeing God's presence NOW, in the world we live in at this moment.

Do we see God coming into our world now or do we judge the world and then choose to isolate ourselves from the world? Do we simply choose to SEE the God we choose, the God who only works the way I choose?

There are so many things in the world that surround our faith during this season of Advent, things like our perceptions, our understandings, and our traditions that seem to...NOT so much get in the way of things but cause us to be somewhat judgmental and short sighted.

² Matthew Skinner comments on Luke's use of "visual language" and repentance on the podcast: *Sermon Brainwave 995: Second Sunday of Advent (Year C)* - for December 8, 2024 at, www.workingpreacher.org

I used to get very frustrated with the church, and what I mean by the church, I mean the folks who would complain about the way the culture prepares for Christmas during the season of Advent. My salvation through faith revealed in the birth of Jesus Christ is NOT diminished, nor is Christ eliminated because someone said “Happy Holidays” to me. I still take it as a kind greeting or salutation because no matter what we say or do, it will never take Christ out of Christmas. I used to get frustrated and somewhat angry about the complaints about Christmas music being played too early, or the complaints about all the decorations and people decorating way too soon. I must admit, I also complained because the hardware stores would put the Christmas decorations on sale right after Halloween, but I complained because they would be sold out by the time I began my decorating and I couldn’t get anything new. And of course, the folks would conclude the complaining by saying the world just doesn’t understand the “true” meaning of Christmas...and I used to think with all the complaining and all my anger about the complaining and my frustration it was very obvious that none of us really SEE or truly understand.

But when I was serving St. James in Columbia there was a place I would drive by and say...yes, no matter how wrong or how removed the world thought Christ was from Christmas, I could see a voice in the wilderness...a voice that was preparing the way, a voice that was giving knowledge of salvation to the people, showing all the salvation of God and it was coming from the very things we think get in the way of this happening.

At the corner of 5th and Locust Streets in Columbia there is a Tattoo Parlor owned and operated by an old biker by the name of Butcher who I met years ago in a biker bar I used to work in as a musician. On the side of his shop that faces 5th street there used to be a life-sized plastic statue of Betty Boop in the shop window. On the outside of the shop, just under the Tattoo sign and below the display window where Betty Boop stood Butcher would place a big plastic Nativity with every character, including the animals. I used to go past the shop and think to myself how wonderful, how glorious is this, Betty Boop watching over God’s message coming to us in this Nativity scene, God’s glorious message breaking into our world not from a pulpit, not from a magnificent church, rather from Butcher, the owner of a tattoo parlor! God’s Word coming from the wilderness and not from the palaces and temples! Some may have been insulted by Butcher’s decorations, but then my guess is that John the Baptist may have insulted the same persons. But from this glorious display one could clearly see that God’s word comes from an unknown prophet in the wilderness, God’s word comes to us, but are we quick to judge the package and the messenger because it’s not what we think it should be or who we think it should be from?

Do we let the world and our short-sightedness get in the way of the urgency of John’s message to see a new perspective in ourselves rather than blaming the world which we are part of whether we like it or not. Do we only “see” the coming of our Lord in a manner that suites ourselves? Will we NOT see the *Parousia* because of the log of misunderstanding that blinds us? If we only choose to see the Lord’s coming as we like, then we ought to see that not all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

We are the human flesh that God has taken on in Jesus Christ...in this birth we once again anticipate, we *SEE* God taking on all human qualities, all human nature, and all sinful flesh so that in that same flesh God shoulders and carries the sins of ALL humanity and reconciles the world to Himself by putting sin to death and making humanity righteous by raising it to new life.

Today we are reminded by the Word that “seeing” is more than a function of the eyes; seeing is discerning, it is perceiving, understanding, recognizing, or experiencing what is happening with the Word of God and what is happening because of that Word around us in the world that we are all part of. So, as we gather today here in this place, may our Advent wreath through the coming weeks as the lights get brighter, may this Advent season also brighten our understandings and our vision just as the season grows brighter.

God does not despise humanity; God becomes humanity in Jesus Christ and will come again to reconcile this world to himself through the very sinful flesh of humanity. God is sending His message to us in this holiday season and it breaks through all that darkens our world, breaks through all the commercialism, and can be found in the midst of all we love and all we despise. May we truly see and then share freely the vision of grace that is salvation for all people in this birth of Jesus Christ our Savior.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.