

+ Luke 21:25-36 + Watch for the Big Arrival! + First Sunday in Advent + 29 November 2009 +

What fills you with anticipation? You're told a special gift is coming from someone you know and love. Your loved one has searched high and low going to great trouble to get it just for you. They know it's a gift you've always wanted. You know the gift is coming, but don't know what it is or when it will arrive. Your anticipation grows for the big arrival.

A loved one who lives far away calls to tell you they will be coming to visit for the holidays. It seems like forever since you last saw them. You have to wait for their arrival, but your anticipation grows as the time gets nearer

A doctor tells a husband and wife that in nine months they will be holding their own newborn son or daughter in their arms. The heartbeat on the sonogram confirms the news. The couple gets ready for the big arrival of their first child and their anticipation grows with each passing day.

A new church year begins today with the season of Advent, a season filled with anticipation, but what are we really anticipating? It's no surprise if we anticipate the family gatherings, the parties, the vacation time from school, the gifts given and received, the special worship services filled with beloved songs of old, even the food. All that is well and good, but only part of our Christmas celebrations, while none is the reason for our Advent anticipation.

Why, then, is the season of Advent such a time of anticipation in the Christian church? Advent gives us more reason to grow with anticipation than just prepping for Christmas. You see, we're getting ready for the Big Arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ—yes, the celebration of his first big arrival as the Babe of Bethlehem, but also his big arrival on the Last Day and the big ways he arrives among us even now through Word, water, and meal.

With that in mind, in our worship here at Cross of Christ this Advent season, we will **get ready for the Big Arrival**. God-willing, we will grow in our anticipation as we await the arrival of God's greatest gift, our beloved Visitor—Jesus Christ. God-willing, we will be encouraged to watch, prepare, and rejoice because the Big Arrival is coming soon, and so with that, Jesus urges you and me, **WATCH FOR THE BIG ARRIVAL! (Read Luke 21)**

When a husband and wife prepare for the birth of their first child, they normally take time to find out what signs to look for when the baby is about to be born. In the final weeks before the baby is born, the doctor asks questions about the mother's condition, if she's noticing any contractions, how she's feeling, how the baby's moving, and so on. Even before that, new parents often take a birthing class to better understand what to watch for and what's going to happen when their baby arrives.

Like those first-time parents, God's people need to get ready for the Big Arrival by learning how to watch for the Big Arrival. Jesus urges us to **know the signs** that will tell us the wait is nearly over. In the verses before our text, Jesus laid out some familiar signs that remind us his Big Arrival on the Last Day is coming soon and this sinful world will come to an end. He said, ***"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven."*** Who of us hasn't seen such signs even on a daily basis? In fact, believers have seen these signs since Christ ascended into heaven as wars, rumors of wars, natural disasters, pandemics, and more pop up year after year. Such signs remind us that the Big Arrival is coming soon like ***"the beginning of birth pains"***.

Still they don't answer "when" Jesus will return. For that, we look to the signs Jesus describes in our text. Much like the contractions of a pregnant mother, these signs give a strong indication that Christ Jesus is about to arrive. ***"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken."***

The laws of nature will suddenly go out of whack. The sun, moon, and stars will seem to no longer follow their regular courses. The perfect balance of the heavenly bodies will be ***"shaken"***. The seas will rage and roar in a way never seen or heard before, and people will be terrified. ***"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."***

How frightening for those who reject Christ, who laugh at his promises, who deny the truth of his Word! How terrifying to those still in unbelief! How frightening these final signs could be for us who daily give in to the temptations of our sinful natures and the sinful world around us! How terrifying because the Big Arrival of Christ, the ***"Son of Man"***, will take place with great power and glory, not in lowliness and humility like his first Arrival as a baby. How terrifying because all your sins and mine, public and private, will be laid bare before Christ's all-seeing gaze, sins for which we deserve to be condemned to eternal death in hell.

...But there's a reason Jesus wants you to **know the signs**. There's a reason a doctor wants a couple to know the signs of labor. If they know the signs, they won't be caught completely by surprise on the day their baby arrives, but will be able to face that day with joy and anticipation. Jesus doesn't want you to be surprised on the day of his Big

Arrival either. He explains, ***“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”***

When the trees and bushes bloom, you know that summer is just around the corner after a long winter. In spite of nice weather this November, the chill in the air reminds us that the snows of winter are coming soon too. You and I know a new season is coming because we know the signs of the seasons.

The same is true of the signs leading up to the Savior’s Big Arrival. You have learned the signs from Jesus himself, so when they happen, you’ll know Christ’s Big Arrival is just around the corner. When you see those terrifying signs near the Last Day, your heart will fill with joy and anticipation, because your Savior is almost here, ***“your redemption is drawing near”***.

That’s not saying that Jesus’ work of forgiving your sins or earning your salvation is incomplete or that you have neither. No, when Jesus made his first Big Arrival, he lived a perfect life, because you have failed to do so. He suffered the punishment of death and hell that you deserve. With his glorious resurrection from the dead, Jesus washed away the guilt of every one of your sins, public or private, all out of love for you. You are forgiven. You are saved, but you’re not with Christ in heaven yet.

That’s why the day of the Big Arrival is so filled with joy and anticipation for believers. Christ is about to completely deliver you from this vale of tears to be with him body and soul forever in heaven. With his own life, Jesus guaranteed that promise, ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words (my promises) will never pass away.”*** It is vitally important, then, that we **know the signs** so we can **watch for the Big Arrival**, but it is just as important that we **always be on the watch**.

Jesus explains, ***“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with self-indulgence, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”*** Being on watch for the arrival of a child can seem like an ever-present task, especially for first-time parents. Being on the lookout for the arrival of a special gift is always in the back of the mind of the recipient. Here Jesus urges you and me to **always be on the watch**, because he could come back at any time. Unlike a package, we can’t track him. Unlike a due date, we can’t guess at his Big Arrival. We just know he’s coming soon.

...But why does he urge us to ***“be careful...be always on the watch, and pray...”***? As you and I know far too well, each of us is plagued with a sinful self within each of us from the newest infant to the oldest adult. That sinful nature wants to weigh you down, overwhelm you, and prevent you from getting ready for Christ’s Big Arrival on the Last Day. If the sinful self wins out, if your heart is weighed down with indulging your selfish desires or with seeking temporary relief from life’s troubles with alcohol or overeating or overspending or weighed down with the anxieties and worries and concerns and fears and busyness of this life, how sad it would be if Christ arrived and found you unprepared for heaven, and instead prepared for hell.

We need to be ever on the watch for Christ’s arrival, but not out of terror of holy judgment. No, we need to always be on the watch out of anticipation of eternal joy that will be ours when Jesus returns in glory. Through faith in him, you take those crushing burdens of your anxieties and guilt and leave them beneath his cross, on which he died to set you free. As you watch and pray, as you spend time in the Word and at the Lord’s Table, you take your troubles to the One who promised, ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*** With God’s help by his grace, Jesus will find you ready for eternity in heaven when he arrives.

As you get ready for the Big Arrival, don’t forget to watch! Jesus is coming soon and you will see him ***“coming in a cloud with power and great glory”***, but it is the ***“Son of Man”*** you will see. You will see the One, who once arrived in lowliness and humility for you. You will see the One, who gave his life on a cross for you. You will see the One, who rose from the dead in glory on Easter morning for you, but whose hands and feet still bear those scars of love for you. You will see him, even if your body is placed in a grave before then, and you will be with him forever. Christ is coming soon! Look forward. Get excited. Watch! Amen.