

“Life Between the Advents”

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” John the Baptist declares that the Son of God has come in the flesh – the Gospel, the good news, which is Jesus – is here! But this is just the beginning – the good news continues.

In truth, the good news declared today is the continuation of the good news that God Himself proclaimed in the beginning – that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. It’s the “comfort” that Isaiah proclaimed in his day – the good news that your “warfare is ended” – your “iniquity is pardoned.”

For years and years and years the people of God were told that there would be a voice crying in the wilderness – preparing the way of the Lord. John the Baptist is that voice – and what does the voice cry out? The Gospel – a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

John announces that the Gospel has come in the flesh – true God has become true man in the person of Jesus Christ. That’s the beginning of which he speaks, but the Gospel continues.

St. Mark in his Gospel will lead us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. St. Luke, in his Gospel, records these words of Jesus, just before He ascends into heaven. Jesus tells His disciples that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations” (24:47).

By this preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins “the way of the Lord” is prepared – sinners are comforted, because their iniquity is forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Even though Jesus ascends into heaven – they will be comforted. And He who ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty – He will come again to judge the living and the dead. That is His Second Advent – the Second Coming of Jesus Christ on the Last Day – to judge, and to take all believers to Himself in heaven.

You who live in these days – live between the two Advents of the Christ – after His coming in the flesh when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary – and before His coming on the Last Day when you shall see Him face to face.

In some respects, you are like the believers of the Old Testament – waiting for the promised to be fulfilled – waiting for Jesus to come. And yet, your waiting is different, because He has come – He has offered Himself as the sacrifice for all sin on the cross – He has crushed the serpent’s head – He has been raised to life again, assuring the resurrection of your body and your life everlasting.

But still you wait. It’s Advent – a time of waiting, and looking forward to the coming of the Savior, your Savior. As you live in the wilderness of this world – surrounded by the prowling devil who seeks to devour you, surrounded by the wickedness of the world that would tempt you to go another way – even now, the voice cries out in the wilderness preparing “the way of the Lord” for you.

The Gospel, the good news that the Son of God has been born for your salvation – that He will come again to take you to heaven – that Gospel continues, as the Advent of Jesus continues to be your comfort in these days.

How does His first Advent comfort you? Well, consider this – that God loved you so much that He took on human flesh. God Himself comes into His creation because your sin has cut you off from God. If God does not take on human flesh, then you are left in your sin – and with it, left to a life of punishment and eternal damnation.

When you see that Baby lying in the manger – remember, this is God loving you. When you see the Son of God nailed to the tree of the cross – remember, this is God saving you, pardoning you from all your iniquity.

Because He first came in the flesh – you now live as a free man – unchained from the sin that bound you – set free from death that frightened you. You live in the comfort of the Babe born in Bethlehem – the good news crucified on the cross and raised to life again on the third day.

That is the Gospel, the comfort that is yours as you await His Second Coming on the Last Day. Because Jesus died and rose again – you look forward to Judgment Day – when you will hear His judgment on all who believe in Him – saying, “Come, receive the everlasting comfort I have prepared for you.”

Living between the two Advents of Christ – “the way of the Lord” is prepared for you because His voice continues to cry out to you. “Repent and believe the Gospel” – confess your sins and trust that in Christ they are forgiven – that’s what the Lord continues to preach to you in the wilderness of this world.

The chains of sin which kept you from fellowship with God, and from loving your fellow man – have been burst. Rather than a life filled with fear of the Lord’s Last Day judgment – filled with the never-ending attempt to prove yourself, hoping to escape the punishment you deserve – you are set free to live by faith in Jesus and in love for your fellow man.

Christ who came in flesh and blood – now gives you His Body and Blood to strengthen that faith and comfort your troubled conscience. His declaration that all your sin is forgiven – makes you long for His return, when He will take you out from the burden of sin and death to His never-ending glory in heaven.

The good news of your salvation is begun, continued, and brought to fulfillment – in Christ Jesus – who you have been united to in Holy Baptism – and in whom you shall live, now, and forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.