

What the First Christmas Can Tell Us About the End of Days

Has the thought ever crossed your mind that the end of this year might be our last Christmas on earth? The precise day and hour of Christ's return remain unknown except to the Father (Matt. 24:36). For the unbeliever, it will happen unexpectedly, when people are doing what they normally do—working in the field, grinding at the mill—just as the people were doing when the flood overtook the world in Noah's day. When they least expect it, the Son of Man will come (Matt. 24:44).

For true believers, signs and prophecies already are recorded in the Scripture (Matt. 16:2-3) and will become clearer as their fulfillment draws closer. Even the Old Testament prophets who predicted the first coming of Israel's Messiah did not fully understand the meaning of their own words (1 Pet. 1:10-11). Only after the events arrived did all the pieces fully come together.

God told Daniel to "shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4a). Its prophecies will make increasing sense to us when world events parallel the predictions found in His Word.

Interestingly, John the Revelator was told, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand" (Rev. 22:10). This may explain the blessing that was pronounced at the beginning of the book on those who read or even hear the words of the prophecy (Rev. 1:3).

The Divine Display

The word "advent" means "coming" or "visit." Modern liturgy identifies the four Sundays before Christmas as the Advent season. Each Sunday of this season can become a teachable

moment for believers to review the history and meaning of Christ's first coming and give renewed understanding to the promises and hope of God's divine display in Christ's Second Coming.

The first coming displayed God in human form. The incarnation demonstrated God's love. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

He came as our Redeemer. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). In a future day, He has promised to restore or make "all things new," including "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1-5).

His first coming had been prophesied for millennia, yet the timing was unknown, the characters in that drama of the ages were unlikely, and many prophecies about His coming were still unfulfilled. His Second Coming will be similar, except all the prophecies of the ages will be fulfilled.

The Divine Delay

The first coming of God's "anointed one," the Christ, was as a child in a stable. However, the Second Coming of this Anointed One will be as King of kings and Lord of lords with power and great glory. His second Advent will be to judge sinners and reward the saints.

Unbelievers often scoff at the seeming delay before the prophesied "Second Coming" due to its unknown duration. But the apostle Peter reminds us that a day or a thousand years is like tomorrow to the Lord (2 Pet. 3:8). He is waiting, Peter says, because He does not want any to perish and is giving more time for sinners to repent (v. 9).

His Second Coming is certain, however, and will be dramatic. Great tribulation and persecution will come in those days, preceding the unprecedented signs or signals in the sky, as

the whole world watches Him arrive “with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:27-30).

Ultimately, He is returning to judge the living and the dead according to their works, to rule as King of kings and Lord of lords and to establish a new heaven and a new earth!

In His incarnational visit, the Son of God came as a baby, grew in wisdom and stature, and taught with authority, like a prophet. He willingly gave up His life to redeem us from our sins and deliver us from the kingdom of darkness.

He is coming again to establish His everlasting kingdom of light over all the earth. As children of light (Eph. 5:8), we must eagerly look forward to this promised second visit! That Advent is sooner now than when we first believed (Rom. 13:11).

This future kingdom’s power and authority can be tasted and tested now. It is a parallel reality that is transitioning from a spiritual truth to a physical force and ruling authority.

In this transitional reality, the past is completed. The present is secure in faith, and the future promises eternal rewards. The apostle Paul taught Timothy that a “crown of righteousness” is prepared for “all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8b).

Paul used the Greek word *epiphania*, which means “a bright manifestation.” He used it several times to instruct Timothy and Titus about believers’ rewards and rewards. In Titus 2:13-14, he linked “the blessed hope” to the “appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for Himself a special people, zealous of good works.”

We all must learn to long for His appearing at His soon return. This is not to just escape the trials and testings of

these last days, but we long for His soon appearance because we truly love Him and want to see Him face to face.

Rightly discerned and practiced celebrations at Christmastime can display His glory. They also can help us and our families develop a passion for His return.

The Divine Disruption

Jesus said in Matthew 24 that His second Advent will be a divine disruption. Paul explained in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 that it will come after the restrained “man of sin is revealed.” This “son of destruction” will commit the abominable acts of which Daniel, Jesus and Paul spoke.

This “prince who shall come” will stand in the holy place and demand to be worshipped “as God” in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 7:25, 9:26-27, 12:11). This will be followed by three-and-a-half years (Dan. 7:25, 9:27) of “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21, 29), which God will shorten “for the sake of the elect” (Matt. 24:22).

In that future context, a rapid sequence of cosmic disturbances will take place. “The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matt. 24:29), just as Joel prophesied (Joel 2:10b).

Finally, the Son of Man will appear in the clouds of heaven “with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). With the sound of a trumpet, His angels will be dispatched and will “gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt. 24:31 and possibly Rev. 14:14-16). This “twinkling of an eye” transformation (1 Cor. 15:51-58) is our victorious hope.

The ‘Blessed Hope’

As we faithfully “endure to the end” (Matt. 24:13, Mark 13:13)

and eagerly await His glorious appearing (see 1 Tim. 6:14), Jesus calls us to be watchful, ready and holy. We must look for His return. "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord will come" (Matt. 24:42). And, again in Matthew 25:13, "Watch therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

The watchful servant keeps active about the Master's business, living in the happy expectation of His physical return. In this mission, we are accountable and will be rewarded accordingly!

Running parallel with this end-time call to watchfulness is a strong warning to avoid being deceived. Jesus said plainly, "Beware lest you be deceived" (Luke 21:8a). The word "deceive" is used many times in the New Testament about ourselves, false prophets, false christs and especially Satan. (If you want to be amazed, do an online word search on "deceive.")

Paul was deeply concerned that the Thessalonians had been deceived into thinking the persecution and tribulation they were facing meant that the "day of Christ is already here" (2 Thess. 2:1-5). Although he may have only been in Thessalonica three Sabbaths (Acts 17:2) to found the congregation, he had faithfully taught details about end-times events and wrote even more in his first epistle to them. He wanted them to be alert, watchful and not deceived by others.

Let us learn to discern the truth about the end times and avoid giving place to doctrinal deceivers, textual speculators and emotional manipulators, who will abound. We must be careful not to believe everything we see or hear in these last days. Ask God, by the Holy Spirit, to reveal the truth to you and expose all errors.

Be ready, using unexpected time and resources wisely and faithfully, not like the "evil servant" in Matthew 24:48-51. As our Lord delays His return even more, the opportunities to

use our gifts and abilities also increase. We must be ready to faithfully and wisely discharge our duties, as we are given modern tools and greater time to use them.

Likewise, in the Parable of the 10 Virgins in Matthew 25:1-13, the wise ones prepared emergency supplies of oil and the means to trim the wicks in their lamps. When the bridegroom came, they were ready and went with him to the wedding banquet.

One indication you're ready for the return of Christ is that you truly want Him to return. The sooner, the better! Jesus doesn't want to return to a church who isn't ready for Him or really doesn't want Him to return—at least not yet. He wants to come for a church who loves Him and longs for His return.

Like a child waiting for Christmas, the church should be eagerly waiting for the soon return of Christ (Heb. 9:28). This "blessed hope" (Titus 2:11-14) should again be a frequent and major theme of pastoral teachings and congregational singing. Why did we cease talking and singing about it?

Be holy, for our Lord is coming to "present to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27b). Paul admonished Timothy to remain unblemished and blameless "until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:14b).

Our Lord's coming is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 in terms of the Greek word *parousia*, which stresses His physical presence. In view of the Lord's delay (Matt. 24:48; 25:5), we must be prepared and watch in committed readiness and spiritual refinement. The "wise" virgins "trimmed their lamps" (Matt. 25:7) as they waited for the arrival and continuing presence of the bridegroom.

The Greek word for "trimmed" is *kosmeo* and relates to our word "cosmetics." It means to beautify, arrange, decorate, furnish, embellish, adorn or put in order. If we would be "holy and

without blemish” for our coming bridegroom, we need to beautify our lives and set them in order by worshipping “the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 29:2).

Some see this delay in our Lord’s return as providing for a revival of holiness before the Second Coming, even if concurrent with intensified evil in our world. Let us “trim our lamps” and be ready for the bridegroom, Jesus Christ our Lord!

The Witness of Christmas

Comparing the end times and Christmas may be an unconventional consideration, but the cultural celebration of this season provides unique occasions for gospel testimony and witness.

The Good News of Jesus Christ has always been connected to the end times. Jesus said, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). The kingdom message has always been about the grace for forgiveness and the power for deliverance.

Communicating the gospel at the end of this age to all ethnicities and people groups—before “the end” comes—is still our mission (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:6-8). And seeing the full release of the power gifts of the Holy Spirit (“signs and wonders”) in this increasingly pagan society will provide a confirming word with accompanying signs (Mark 16:15-20).

Instead of a commercialized Christmas in our heads, let us determine to make this season Spirit-filled in our hearts. Let us remember that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no change or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

Connecting the “Good News” with the “kingdom,” which often precedes the healing of sickness and disease in the Scriptures (Matt. 9:35), is powerful. You see, the kingdom of God exists

everywhere the King is. For now, Christ's kingdom is "not of this world" (John 18:35-38). However, the Gospels reveal the good news that His authority and reign will eventually rule over every evil thing, including "every sickness and every disease" (Matt. 9:5-8,35).

God invites us to accept the gift of His Son's redemptive work on the cross and to partner with Him (Luke 19:13) in eternal kingdom business—"doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38)—until He returns to establish His physical rule on the earth.

The Peace of Christmas

Finally, in this special season, we are reminded that King Jesus is called "Immanuel" (Isa 7:14, Matt. 1:23), meaning "God with us." Let's allow every beautifully trimmed tree and every delightful carol to be grace-filled reminders that our King Jesus is with us.

He is in our midst and able to bring justice where injustice may now exist and to right every wrong. He can heal our bodies, restore relationships and mend broken hearts. He can forgive the past, strengthen our present and open up the future.

That is the "Good News of the kingdom," which Jesus taught and which we proclaim this Christmas. He is our only hope and resource for meeting every need.

Country music singer-songwriter John Rich debuted a new song, "Earth to God," during Franklin Graham's Washington, D.C., Prayer March 2020. This moving musical plea to God was featured several times during the livestreaming event.

Near the end, Rich was interviewed about the song's background. He said that during the COVID-19 lockdown, he had come to realize that "the entire world was in the same bad situation, all at the same time. I've always believed that

‘man cannot fix man’s problems’ but God can! The thought of our planet sending an SOS to God came to my mind, and the song was born.”

Rich said he doesn’t really feel that he even wrote the song since it came together in about half an hour. He believes the song was a gift from God, calling forth the message of the kingdom: “We need your light, we need your love/to heal the world you made/And save us now in our darkest hour/with your amazing grace/... Earth to God (Come in, God).”

“I recorded it to hopefully bring peace, hope and unity to every human being who hears it,” Rich said, adding an “Amen.”

That contemporary hope for peace and unity was the recurring dream and prayer at the time of Christ’s first Advent. It will be the same—but different—at His second Advent. Jesus said He alone can give us peace that is totally unlike anything the world can give (John 14:27). His peace is permanent and powerful, unlike any human peace treaty or meditative musing.

I invite you to join me in this end-times Christmas season in renewing our commitment to a Matthew 6:33 life, to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” so that “all these things shall be given to you.”

READ MORE: For further insights into the blessed hope of Christ’s Second Coming, visit

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