

Luke 21:27-28 (NIV) At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Dear friends in our Savior,

We don't like to wait. It doesn't matter where, either. In the long line at the checkout...when traffic is stopped on the interstate for no apparent reason...in an airport when the monitor says your flight has been delayed...to get in to see the doctor...for the doctor to get back to you with test results. None of those sound like pleasant experiences to us. We don't view waiting as a pleasant past time or something that we relish. In fact, it can be a rather frustrating waste of time.

Not all waiting is frustrating nor a waste of time, especially when you have something that is worth waiting for. Advent is a call for us to wait, not in frustration, but quietly, patiently, expectantly and joyfully for the coming of our Lord. Advent waiting is something that God's people have been doing since God first promised a Savior from sin after the fall in Eden. For 4,000 years, God's people waited for that promise to be fulfilled. The entire Old Testament speaks of their waiting, eagerly looking forward to the Messiah that God had promised to them. But that was for 4,000 years! That's a long wait. Their waiting was over when Jesus came into the world. God's promise was fulfilled in Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. God kept his promise to bring a Savior from sin. He kept his long awaited promise to rescue his people and bring salvation through his only Son. They often got restless in their waiting and tried to go their own way. Despite all of the unfaithfulness of God's people throughout the 4,000 year wait, God remained faithful to his promise. Man's unfaithfulness did not negate God's faithfulness. In love, he sent his Son and redeemed mankind. Though the waiting was at times tough and difficult, when Jesus came they found out that He was worth the wait!

Before Jesus left this world, he made another promise to his people. *"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* (John 14:3) Jesus promised his people that he would come back and bring them a final deliverance from their sin and take them to his eternal mansion of heaven to live with him forever. That was 2,000 years ago that Jesus made this promise. We are still waiting for this promise to be fulfilled. This is what Advent is all about. We are patiently and quietly waiting for the LORD to come back to this earth and bring his salvation.

Waiting patiently and quietly can be a difficult thing, even when we are waiting for the salvation of our God. It is not easy to wait quietly, especially in this pre-Christmas atmosphere. Very little about the way we prepare and celebrate our modern day Christmas season says anything about quiet preparation. The masses in our world are about hurrying and scurrying to get everything done. A half hour trip to the mall turns into a three hour ordeal by the time you deal with traffic, parking places, finding what you need, waiting in line to check out and then getting back home. That throws the rest of the schedule off and makes things even tighter! Add to that the kids programs at school, the Christmas parties at work and in the neighborhood, the extra obligations that always come and trying to find one moment of quietness proves difficult. We are tempted to get caught up in the tide and carried away with the secularization that has become the hallmark of Christmas. Advent calls us to slow down and not get entangled in the hustle and bustle of the season but to remain focused on what really matters.

Waiting patiently isn't easy for us either. While Jesus encourages us in the text to lift up our heads toward his coming, we can all too easily leave our heads lowered and focused on what is before us. If you read through the entire chapter 21 of Luke prior to the two verses before us, Jesus is explaining the signs that will mark the end of times and will precede his second coming. What Jesus explains can be rather terrifying. Wars and rumors of war. Great earthquakes, famines and pestilence in various places. Fearful events and great signs from heaven. God's people will be persecuted terribly. They will be betrayed even by those closest to them—brothers, parents, relatives and friends. They will be hated by all people. There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. Nations will be in anguish and perplexity. Men will faint in fear from terror and apprehension of what they will face. Waiting patiently through trials like this can be excruciatingly difficult.

All these things keep our heads lowered to the ground. People worry about terrorism. People worry about weather and natural disasters. People are worried about their jobs and taking care of their families. People are worried about the government. They are worried about escalating prices. You can't go into city hall these days without being checked for a weapon. You can't get on an airplane without taking your belt and shoes off. People shoot each other on the freeway. Paul tells us that things will keep getting worse: *"There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, loves of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power."* (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

Despite all of this, God's encouragement for us as we wait patiently is that we stand up and lift up our heads. Why? Remember what it is we are waiting for: our redemption is drawing near! These signs are not intended to frighten or terrify us. They are not intended to make us ball up into the fetal position and hide from the world. Their intent is to comfort us that Jesus is coming soon. Their intent is to take our focus off of the problems of the here and now and direct them to the redemption of Jesus that is drawing near. Jesus reminds us what is coming: *"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* These signs mean that all of our lamenting about sin and its effects on our lives and family will be coming to a close. It means Jesus will be coming soon to usher us from the sadness and tragedy of this world into the eternal and endless presence of our Lord. Every sign that points to the end of the world and fills the hearts of unbelievers with fear and terror brings joy and hope to the hearts of God's people. We lift up our heads in anxious expectation because our redemption is drawing near.

Our Advent expectation is nourished by the confidence that the Lord who came once as he promised, will come again—as he promised. Advent joy is enriched by the confidence that what we are waiting for and what he will bring when he comes is the salvation of the Lord! What God's OT people waited for is an accomplished fact, signed, sealed and delivered by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We live in the confidence that our God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He who kept his word to his Old Testament people will keep his word to his New Testament people. Whether God's people have to wait 2 more years, 200 more years, or 2,000 more years, we do so in the confidence and joy that he will return, he will bring an end to all the sadness and lamentations of our world, and will bring us into the eternal life that he has secured and prepared for us through Jesus our Savior.

What a spectacular sight it will be when our Savior comes again. Through the blackness and darkness of this world, he will appear in all of his power and glory to do away with sin and its consequences forever!! Rather than being afraid of that day as so many in our world are, those who trust in Christ can look forward to that day with joy and confidence. In Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we are right with God. We need not be downtrodden or downcast as we see the signs that Jesus predicted and face the effects of sin in this world. With the promises of our God, we can look up in joy, hope and trust. We lift up our heads to the sky to see the salvation of our Lord coming to bring us final deliverance from this world to himself in heaven.

When we are reminded what it is that we are waiting for, we can wait—patiently, quietly, expectantly and joyfully. The somber, meditative atmosphere of Advent will give way to the joy and celebration of Jesus' return. As you wait for the coming of our Lord, do so patiently trusting the promises of God to help you stand firm against the forces of Satan still active in this world. As you wait for the coming of the Lord, do so quietly, reflecting on God's love in Jesus. As you wait for the coming of our Lord, do so with great expectation, knowing that he will bring his redemption and salvation. As you wait for the coming of our Lord, do so with great joy in your hearts. God has not forgotten his people. He will keep them safe as they wait and rescue them finally when he comes. Stand up, lift up your heads and rejoice that your salvation is drawing near! That's something that is worth waiting for. Amen.