

The Time Has Come!

A sermon based on Romans 16:25-27.

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

For those of you who have been actively keeping up with all these Advent predictions (aka when Jesus is coming back), I'm sure you were disappointed a few months ago, September 23 to be exact...because yet again another prediction for the end of the world failed as conspiracy theorist David Meade's unseen planet, Nibiru...well, it still remains unseen and didn't destroy the earth, as he was so convinced it would.

But that's ok, the next chance for that is just a few years away. Jeane Dixon, a physic, is claiming Armageddon will take place in 2020, and Jesus will defeat the "unholy trinity" sometime between 2020 and 2037, to give herself a bit of a buffer (a smart play!). I guess we really ought to pray that he will come that soon; I don't know if I'd be advising you to take any stock in that prediction, though. You know, as well as I do, predicting Jesus' return is impossible. It could be 20 years; it could be 10 duotrigintillion years (that's 1 with 100 0's behind it), and yes, that's a legitimate prediction I found.

Anyways, I was looking online, and by my estimate, since the turn of the century, there have been roughly 20 different dates/years given...predicted as the time when this world will finally come to an end. That's more than 1 predicted date per year.

If only the date of Jesus' second coming was only as dependable as the date for his first...December 25, right. Except, in all likelihood, that wasn't the actual day of Jesus' birth. And I'm pretty confident no one (not even the prophets) knew for sure the exact timing of the coming of the Savior. Oh, they knew a few of the details...the Messiah was coming; he'd be born of a virgin; he'd be born in Bethlehem. God had promised all that; therefore, it would happen.

Makes you wonder, though, with these prophecies giving specific details, why then was Jesus' birth such a shock? Why was Mary somewhat confused when the angel told her she, a virgin, was going to give birth to the Son of God? Why would Jewish shepherds near Bethlehem have been so shocked and terrified to be surrounded by an angel chorus proclaiming glad tidings of the birth of the Savior, the Christ? How did the Magi not just head straight for Bethlehem instead of stopping at Jerusalem and tipping Herod off that a possible threat to his throne had been born? Why didn't Herod already have some kind of protocol in place to make sure any baby boys born in Bethlehem that night would be apprehended and disposed of so he could hang on to his throne? Or the fact that he was even so nervous about his throne being taken since that child was coming to be the Savior?

Ok, to be fair, Mary's name wasn't specifically mentioned as the virgin who would give birth to the Savior. The shepherds had no clue of the exact date of Jesus' birth...had no way of knowing. The wise men from the East didn't have Old Testament prophecies; they merely followed the star. And Herod...I'm not going to make any excuses for him.

The reality was, for all the details the prophecies provided concerning the coming of the Christchild, God's timing was still a mystery. The time had come, and no one was fully ready.

Should they have been?

At the end of Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes about this mystery, ***"hidden for long ages past...now revealed and made known."*** The mystery was God's gracious plan of salvation, fulfilled in that tiny baby born in Bethlehem, who lived and died and rose for us. What was a mystery to Old Testament believers, including all those right up to the birth of Jesus (when it would happen, how it would happen), that mystery's been solved for us.

We're facing a different mystery, though...the mystery of when our final salvation will take place...when our Savior will return and take us to our heavenly home. And again, Scripture gives us details. Jesus, before his death on the cross, spoke about signs of the End Times – wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, false prophets coming and leading many astray, the gospel reaching the ends of the earth. And we see all that happening today. But what we still don't know is God's exact timing. For all the theories and dates people have predicted throughout the years...those are at best uneducated guesses, because God's Word tells us no one can know.

But the reality is, it could happen at any time. So are you fully ready? Should you be?

On the Your Time of Grace video devotion at the beginning of the week, the pastor revealed an amazing discovery/embarrassing admission...for 1600 years, the day of Christmas has never changed. It's always been (and always will be) December 25th. We know that. And yet, when that day comes, he and so many other people aren't quite ready...don't have everything quite the way they want it. Is that you?

I know that's me. Christmas is always the same time every year, yet I'm always under the gun...doing last minute shopping, wrapping presents, getting two or three services ready, making my Chex mix, writing and sending out Christmas letters and gifts, and all the other prep work that goes into celebrating the holiday. There's always the pressure of trying to get everything done on time...and that's having a full year of knowing what I'll have to do...and having a full year of time to get ready.

Is that you, too? Do you thrive with the last minute shopping? Are you a procrastinator, but you still get everything done...because you know the deadline? Can you see why that won't work for Jesus' advent? Friends, the time has come. The world is prepped. The signs of the times are here. Jesus could return at any moment. Are you ready?

You know, it's one thing not to have your Christmas cards ready; it's a whole different thing not to be ready for Jesus' coming again. Are you thinking more about the parties you're going to than the feast that never ends? Are you more concerned about making this Christmas perfect, or about the perfect days you'll get to spend with Jesus? Are you spending more on Christmas, or are you investing in your faith life, making use of things like Daily Bible Reading emails, WELS devotions, midweek Advent worship, Sunday morning Bible Class?

There's a different kind of pressure we're facing today, the pressure from the devil, the world, our sinful natures who are encouraging us to do literally anything else rather than getting and being ready for Jesus to come.

But the truth is, this life...it's like playing a game of hide and seek, and God is the one counting down the time til he shouts, "Ready or not, here I come!" And we can't hear...we don't know how much time is left in the countdown, but when he shouts, "Ready or not, here I come," will you be ready? How will he find you?

Again, as we continue our Christmas countdown during this season Advent, this last Sunday of Advent proclaims, “The time has come!”

The Old Testament Lesson reminds us that the time has come *for the fulfillment of prophecy*. The Lord promised David a great name, rest from his enemies, and an eternal kingdom—all promises which had their ultimate fulfillment in his greater descendant, the Messiah. The angel Gabriel’s announcement of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary in today’s Gospel shows the time has come *for the birth of God’s Son*. And now, the Apostle Paul proclaims the time has come for the revelation of God’s mystery.

This Advent season, we’ve spent the time unwrapping the prophecies foretelling the coming of the Savior. Even better, we’ve been spending our whole lives being prepared and established by the good news proclaimed in the gospel...the good news that, in spite of our sin, in spite of how unprepared for Christ’s return we’ve been at times and are still at times today, in spite of how we might even be treating Jesus’ second advent as more of an inconvenience than our greatest desire...in spite of all that, our Savior has been born.

The good news of Christ’s perfect life, his innocent death, his glorious resurrection from the dead, those are the delicious treats we get to enjoy until Jesus returns.

Right, that’s why we can never get enough of the Sunday School children reciting the simple Christmas story from Luke 2....not just because of how cute they are...but because the story itself fills us with such joy, that at the right time, God would come down to earth, take on human flesh for us...that in the manger, we see the face of our Savior....the face of salvation.

We don’t know when Jesus is going to come again, but we can look forward to that day in anticipation, like the child who knows exactly how many more sleeps until Christmas (it’s 8 more sleeps, by the way!). We look forward to that day because he once came in weakness, now he comes in glory. He once came as a baby in a manger, now he comes as a mighty king. He once came to die. And the very next time you see him, he’ll be coming to raise the dead and bring you to that very special place that we like to think of at Christmas...to take you home.

When I was in college at MLC – the best holiday of the year...it wasn’t Christmas. Becky would probably tell you, too, the best day of the year was, of course, Arbor Day. We had no idea when exactly that day would be until the seniors came strutting through your hallway, crashing together garbage can lids, shouting at the top of their lungs the loud accolades of the glorious day, so get up, get out, cuz it’s Arbor Day!

Again, we never knew the exact day, but you’d have people playing what we called “Arbor Day roulette,” saying, “We’re thinking tomorrow’s going to be the day, so we’re going to play the odds and not do any homework tonight or study for that huge quiz or test, stay up late and have some fun and just hope against all hope we’re right.”

Can we live like that...but instead of putting off our obligations, what God wants us to do and how he wants us to be living, we live every moment in the joy of God’s grace and the peace of his forgiveness, that we eagerly anticipate the Last Day as if it’s tomorrow by making sure we’re ready to go, spiritually speaking, right now?

Friends, the time has come. The time is now. If you haven't already shipped out Christmas gifts, you might be too late to get them there on time. If you still have some Christmas shopping left to do, you're going to be finding empty shelves and long lines to check out. But whether you're ready or not, Christmas is coming.

All of these missed dates predicting the end of the world...they're enough reminders, aren't they...that we don't know when the end is coming...but it's coming.

Until that time, we give thanks for Jesus' first coming. Until that time, we're getting ready for his second coming.

So, now, in the midst of all the hustle and bustle of these last moments before Christmas, find time to be quiet, to be alone, to shed tears of joy and gladness: He, the sum of all that God has to say to us, is about to descend once more to the lowly manger of our hearts!

And we hurry to the manger, like the shepherds, and then we keep coming back to worship our King with our regular church attendance and regularly, daily, being in his Word. And then we go and share the good news abroad, like they did. Now, like the wise men, we present our gifts to Jesus – our time, our talents, our treasures. Now, like Mary, put our full confidence in God and his promises, and then we take the time to treasure what great things God has done in our lives.

And until that time when he comes, as Paul writes, we ***"believe and obey him,"*** so that through our prepared lives ***"to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen."***