

Luke 21:25-36

Today is the Church's New Year...Happy New Year!

This Year, Year C in our lectionary, we will go through the gospel of Luke!

A little introduction...This author's name (Luke) never appears in the book.

But this gospel is a companion volume to the book of Acts which matches the exact language and structure... meaning that both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were written by the same person.

Both books are also addressed to someone named Theophilus, in Greek, meaning One who loves God...perhaps a high-ranking Roman Official or a patron of some sort...or just a non-Jewish, Gentile God lover just like us here!

The writer was likely a gentile companion of Paul's and most scholars believe it was Paul's physician friend Luke...hence we call it the gospel of Luke...but no one knows for sure.

Luke's writings are that of a well-educated person with a command of the written Greek language compared with the other gospels written in Koine Greek or the Common spoken Greek.

Luke wanted to communicate to Theophilus the place of a gentile Christian in God's kingdom based on the teachings of Jesus. He, like Paul, wanted to communicate this way of being, by preaching the gospel and spreading Jesus' teachings to the whole of the world...not just to those in Israel.

Luke is one of the synoptic gospels and shares much of Mark and Matthew's account of Jesus' life.

His gospel emphasizes universality, a recognition of gentiles as well as Jews in God's plan, he mentions prayer a lot and focuses on the special concerns for the place of women and the poor and the marginalized. Luke really emphasizes inclusion!

And he uses more parables than any other gospel writer in teaching us about the way of Jesus.

He writes for the non-Jewish folks of his day, showing that they too have a place in God's world! I would urge you to read Luke's gospel and Acts back to back to get a sense for this writers unique perspective and message.

Now today we also celebrate the First week of ADVENT! Now we are in Blue (or Purple in many churches) to highlight this part of the church's liturgical year. See time and cycles matter to us...and the liturgical colors provide a visual aid to the changing seasons.

Do you remember a week back we ended Year B in Mark's Gospel with Mark's little apocalypse!

And how in that reading Jesus is teaching at the temple just before he was to be arrested and killed...and for every ending there is always a new beginning!

An apocalypse...a new revelation... especially if we are looking for it...being awake and aware!

Jesus today says, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken...more like the powers of the earth to be honest!

Again we have an apocalypse...Luke's apocalypse (we end and begin our church year in revelation – Why? It's a birth/death/rebirth cycle. God being born through a breaking of the world in some way.

Then Jesus tells them a parable about seasonal changes reflected in time... through observing the trees. Look at a tree and you can tell the season...The church season and the natural seasons also line up don't they!

Advent begins in death and darkness as the old dies and makes way for something new to be born. Now notice that Jesus' actual birth date was more likely in April for that's when the Shepherds glean the fields in Israel... but the early Church lines up Jesus' birth with the Winter Solstice...looking for light when the world is at its literal darkest.

We are looking at the apocalypse here, remember from last week that Greek word means revelation...we look to the darkness to see that which is being born into it.

So we begin Advent symbolically by lighting a candle each week...building light until Jesus is born...and today we begin our Advent with the foretelling of Jesus' own death...and what will be born from that death for us today!?

A new word for us Eschatology. Eschatology is the part of theology concerned with the final events of history, or the ultimate destiny of humanity. This concept is commonly referred to as "the end of the world" or "end times"...and here this will soon be Jesus' end time!

But through Jesus' death...through Jesus' end of times, we are born again into a new destiny for humanity!

Through Jesus' death the temple where God dwelled was broken open and with it God's Spirit was unleashed into the world...not to dwell inside a building... but now to be born into our hearts...The Spirit of God come to dwell within us!

Don't ever forget that God dwells within you! (Emanuel God with us)

That was the Apocalypse of Jesus! And every year we intentionally remember...and reconnect with this reality...as we call God into being through the indwelling of the Spirit born in us and through us.

So what must die in you this Advent season for something new to come from that brokenness?

Each Advent we look into our own darkness to seek the spark to recognize the light that dwells inside us too! What is being born!?

Look around...what is being born in the world? And this Advent Season what is to be born in you!? How is "God's kingdom to come" through you?

Luke focused his gospel on discipleship! A life lived in between this world and what is to come...an awareness...and a waiting...an "in between" time!

A now and not yet approach to experiencing God in our midst.

The world can be a scary place...And "stuff happens" doesn't it?!

So don't let your hearts be troubled...be patient...although waiting can sometimes be hard...those in between times...those desert times...yet there will always be renewal and rebirth. The dawn will come! The trees will sprout new growth come spring! (Easter:Spring)

Something IS coming...and something IS being born.

So be awake and aware and don't be fooled by all the noises and distractions here in the kingdom of man.

What does the world look like right now? Christmas decorations and Holiday songs right after Halloween?! Gift giving and daily feeds on new sales and Black Friday...now beginning Monday and extended to Saturday...now every Friday...but wait there's more...Cyber Monday sales too but do they begin today on Sunday!

In a consumer driven profit driven country... more is better and happiness is just one click away...money makes you happy and money makes the world a better place! That's what I see happening in all the noise at the beginning of this Holiday season...this advent!

The Grinch had it right...the one thing I can't stand is all the noise, noise, noise of the season! And the Grinch in Dr. Suess' beloved book sets out to silence that noise... only to realize there was something so much more behind what his senses were being assaulted with.

And that's always the challenge for us too isn't it? How do we sense that which is hidden by all the noise of the world!

Sometimes to reveal what's there, we need something to break in order to silence the world... so that we can more clearly hear that still small voice of God shouting to us in the silence of the wilderness. Just look at the silence that was created during our COVID shelter in place. So much was put in proper perspective then.

Family over Work ...the great resignation, A spoiled Nation that relied on everyone else to deliver to them their every whim...but no longer. Even the natural world quickly reclaimed the earth as we retreated.

If you came here today to officially start the Christmas shopping season off with a warm and fuzzy gospel reading... sorry to disappoint... you won't find cute baby Jesus and cuddly sheep today!

Instead of sweet baby Jesus...this is adult frightening Jesus...and for the next two weeks we get his adult frightening cousin John telling us that our world will be turned upside down and broken!

The season of Advent requires a very different kind of perspective and preparation. One that can't be found in shopping malls, Holiday catalogs, or on Amazon!

Luke's apocalypse today paints a frightening, bold and beautiful picture of what is to come. And Jesus challenges us to pay close attention and to get ready as we prepare for something new to be born...and most likely it won't be what we want will it?!

But it will be exactly what we need!

So we intentionally prepare for many things this Advent season:

For the coming to earth... of the infant Jesus...incarnate.

For the coming to earth of the resurrected Jesus... to usher in a new heaven and a new earth.

And more importantly for us I think... for the coming to earth of the Spirit of Jesus born this season in each one of your hearts...revealing to the world... God's kingdom come... through you and me!

Luke in this gospel ultimately does not dwell on fear and damnation but rather hope and expectation...the perfect posture to begin our Advent Season and the Churches new year!

Famine, drought, war and disease still plague our world today! People struggle daily with anxiety, greed, addiction, mental illness and a fixation on the world and all of its stuff!

Jesus calls us to cut through the noise and to watch and wait for God's kingdom to come breaking into the world. And NOW is always the perfect time for an apocalypse...a revelation!

Our world is broken, and in many ways so are we...we wait for the arrival of God in our lives as we prepare to receive God's Spirit anew! The good news is not simply that Christ IS coming... but that Christ comes to us over and over and over again...not at some future date and time... but right now in the silence!

The dawn will come...the spring will burst forth new life. Regardless of where you are in your lives today...Advent offers us the hope and expectation for something new.

You just have to wait, look and listen for it. Where is God showing up in your life and where have you met God lately!?

I urge you to use this Advent season to intentionally prepare and watch for God's kingdom come, as we await the radical...earth shattering welcome of Jesus reborn in our world and in us... as a little baby AND as our risen Lord!

Your faithful servant,

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