



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday November 29, 2015 - Advent 1

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.

The passage selected for the Sermon is taken from the Gospel:

And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

You will notice that this week marks a change in the Church Calendar. The Purple trim on the altar and purple vestments replace the green or white vestments we have worn since Easter. Today we enter the season of Advent, which extends for four Sundays before the celebration of Christmas. We wear purple because Advent is a season of penitential preparation. While the world uses this season as a commercial countdown to Xmas, the Church dedicates this season for meditation on last things, death judgment and the Apocalypse.

The term Apocalypse is both familiar and misunderstood. Our culture generates an endless stream of post-apocalyptic scenarios in books, movies, and for the younger people, video games. In the cultural version, the Apocalypse is only meant for most of us, who are wiped out by either own stupidity in destroying the earth with nuclear weapons, or by a vengeful manifestation of Mother Nature who turns on us for our constant malice against the elements of earth. What is common to all these post-apocalyptic worlds is that the constant victim of the catastrophe is law and judgment. Surviving are a few hearty souls

with their own sense of morality, usually vengeful and bloody, and a variety of lawless hoodlums, zombies or some other mutation of the worst of humanity.

The Apocalypse for which we prepare in Advent is very different. First and foremost, it is universal. There will be no hearty bands of bikini clad survivors or voracious mutants. The end time is just that, it is the complete and final dissolution of dominion of this world by Satan, sin and death. The concern for knowing the time of the Apocalypse has become for Christians what waiting for the Messiah was for the Jews. The Apostles themselves begged to know when the end times would come, though Jesus reminded them that the evil of the day was sufficient for their concern. Since then, there has been a constant stream of Revelations interpreting, self proclaimed Messiahs claiming the end times were scheduled next week or next month. We mock them when each deadline passes, but to be honest, we look at the events of the world, disasters natural and political, and we do wonder if we aren't at the end of time.

The truth is that our day is long spent, and we are approaching the end time. The end time may or may not be the catastrophic end of the world, but it is inevitably the end of our personal world. Whether we are 20 or 90, we are closing in on the end of our days. The moon will be blackened, the sun will cease to shine, and we will be lit only by the love of God that illuminates the world on the other side of the veil of death. We each will experience the Apocalypse, the dissolution of the power of Satan and sin and sickness and death that permeates our living. We will see the end of sadness and despair and fear and loneliness. We will have perfect knowledge, endless love, communion with God and those with whom we shared Godly love.

It is appropriate that we set aside a season to think about our end, not only our termination, but end, meaning the purpose for which we were created. It is good for us to weaken the bonds of self interest, greed, and materialism that keep us from our commandment to love of God and neighbor. It is good to look beyond the fears and loneliness and sadness of this time to the mystical joy that is to come. That is the purpose of the season of Advent, a worthy purpose which is good for us to embrace.

The reading from the Gospel might seem strangely placed in the context of the Advent season. The procession to the Temple from Palm Sunday starts the passage and it ends with the driving of the merchants from the Temple. However, the passage does perfectly represent the purpose of the season. It has been man's tendency to rationalize the very straightforward and direct commands of God into convoluted reasoning that justifies our self indulgence and self importance. Regularly we warp the purpose of our worship and the service we are meant to give to our parish families into prideful and material ends. When Jesus makes the journey in this passage from Messiah to purifier of the Temple, he reminds us that the Temple is not made for earthly praise. The Hosannah's of men give way too soon to the purpose of the Prince of this world. In the end, the purpose of the Incarnation of Christ is not to fulfill the economic, political or even spiritual ambitions of this world. His purpose is to separate us from those ambitions, to reacquaint us with our purpose, to drive from us all that is ungodly, so that our affections will be heavenly when our time on this earth comes to its end, whether that end be cataclysmic or intensely personal.

It is important for us to remember that the successor to the temple is not the parish or cathedral or basilica. The Temple is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit of God. In Baptism, each of us is made the Temple. We are place where the Holy Spirit of God resides. The reminder of the Gospel today is that the way home to heaven is only navigable through the Cross, that in death, the accolades and the material trappings of this world will be shed. When we encounter Jesus as our Judge, the selfishness, the self importance, even the self indulgent anxieties of this world will be driven from us so that Temple to be presented to His Judgment will be the pure dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

This purification is not something to be feared. We know, despite our desperate attachment to selfishness, and materialism, that the purposes of this world never bring us happiness. When we amass material gain, all we realize is anxiety over its impermanence and greed for what we fear others might have. Selfishness and self importance lead only to depression and suspicion and loneliness. It is only the sacrifices of love, the giving of our possessions, our time, and even our lives, in charity and Godly love, that bring us the blessing of peace. As Christians, we know in our hearts and souls that we are made for the world to come, and that we have to make way for the world to come even as we toil though the sadness of the world we inhabit now.

We know it also by instruction, because we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us Himself, "Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus, who loves us, doesn't teach us to pray for a Hollywood style Apocalypse. He isn't some mad Director leading is all to our doom. The thoughts He has for us are not for evil, bit for good.

He teaches us to pray for a Holy Apocalypse, one in which we release our desperate grasp on the principles and principals of this world, which bring us nothing but sadness, and loneliness and fear. Jesus wants us to make room in our hearts by driving our the material and selfish and worldly, so that what is Godly can be poured into us, and through us to the people we have been given to love. It is in the Second Coming that the promises that God has made for us will be fulfilled, eternal life, ecstatic joy, the ability to love each other with the unending font of Godly love that will enlighten our lives.

The Second Coming is the time we should anticipate. It is a time for which we should prepare. The time is long past that we should separate ourselves from our attachment to this fallen world, and to look forward to the world we were created to inhabit. The time is now for us to live the prayer that Jesus Himself taught us to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, The Kingdom come, they will be done, on earth, in our lives and world, as it is in heaven."

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen