

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 20, 2015**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 605, 56:5, 604, 611:1-5, 609.

Lessons: Job 19:25-27, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Mark 13:5-37.

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:31-46.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We generally speak of Christ's two Advents, or comings. In our Sunday worship this Advent season so far we have spoken of his first physical coming to earth, his coming in mercy and his coming with forgiveness to hearts rejoicing.

His first physical coming is his coming to earth to be born a child so that he could live as a human – sinfree – and then die for sins – the sins of all mankind. The second physical coming is his coming to judge the living and the dead on the last day. He came once physically in great humility, to suffer and die for sin. He will come again in great power and glory. Be assured, today, that

**JESUS WILL COME AGAIN PHYSICALLY TO JUDGE ALL MANKIND**

1. **He will come.**
2. **His judgment will be final, and**
3. **Although it will be a dreadful day for unbelievers,**
4. **All who believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin will rejoice eternally!**

He will come. That is part of our most public confessions – the universal Christian Creeds. We confess as an article of faith that Jesus Christ “sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” The Nicene Creed is similar, but adds “He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.” In the Athanasian Creed on page 53 in The Lutheran Hymnal we confess that “He ascended into heaven; He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

The fact of Christ's return is clearly taught in Scripture. We read at his ascension into heaven that ***“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*** (Acts 1:11 NIV) He came to earth and ***“so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”*** (Hebrews 9:28 NIV)

In our sermon text you heard of what will happen when he comes in judgment. ***“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”*** (Matthew 24:30 NIV) Paul writes: ***“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.”*** (1 Thessalonians 4:16 NIV)

Christ now comes to us invisibly, spiritually, through his Word and Sacraments (John 14: 23); but when he comes at the end of time, his coming will be visible. ***“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”*** (Matthew 24:30 NIV)

All people who ever lived and died will be raised from the dead and all who are living at that moment will all be gathered together and Jesus will appear to all mankind at the same instant. His coming will happen as

quickly as the lightning flashes over the sky. ***"For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other."*** (Luke 17:24 NIV) It is not for us to ask how this is possible. God's Word tells us this is the way it will happen.

Christ will come in power and great glory. He will not come in humility and lowliness, as he did when he was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary in a stable. At that coming, it was possible for some not to recognize him as the Son of God. But at his second coming he will appear in heavenly splendor and majesty, so that all men shall know at once who he is.

No man knows the day or time of his coming. Christ will come at the end of the world, on the last day of this present order of things, after which there will be ***"a new heaven and a new earth"*** (Revelation 21:1 NIV), a glorious place for believers.

The day of Christ's return has already been appointed by God, but the date is not revealed. In the same way that we know the certainty, but not the date of our death, so we know that Christ will certainly return, but we do not know when he will come. The reason for withholding this knowledge from us is so that we should be ready at all times. Jesus himself warns us: ***"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."*** (Luke 21:34-36 NIV)

Although our text does not speak of the signs of his coming, many have been identified in the Scriptures and it is plain that all have been fulfilled or accomplished, and thus Christ could come at any moment. Our Gospel lesson tells of some of those signs. The day will come soon, because the signs which are to indicate it is near have been fulfilled and are continuing to be seen. There are and have been signs in nature: earthquakes, floods, storms, eclipses of the sun and moon. There have been and are signs in the life of men and nations: wars and rumors of war, pestilence, famine, unrighteousness in all the affairs of men, perilous times. There have been and are signs in the visible Church: false teachers, hypocrisy, love waxing cold, falling away from the truth and from the faith, the appearance of antichrist. Some of the things mentioned as signs of Christ's coming had happened before, and may even now be explained from natural causes. This, however, does not mean that they are not to be regarded as signs of Christ's imminent coming. Christ made them signs of his coming, and as we observe them, we are to be reminded that the end is at hand. One writer gave this illustration: A bodily ailment may have a natural cause, and yet it is a precursor of death; in like manner these things are precursors of the final destruction of this present world.

The beginning of the end, or things that lead unto and develop into the end were noticeable even in the days of the apostles. In Matthew chapter 24 and in our Gospel lesson the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world are pictured side by side, and are interwoven with each other. The destruction of Jerusalem was, as it were, the prelude to the Final Judgment, a sign, and, at the same time, the beginning of the end. For this reason Peter already in his day could say: ***"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray."*** (1 Peter 4:7 NIV) Today these signs are more evident and plain. The next thing we may look for is the end itself.

The purpose of these signs is to prepare us.

Jesus' coming will be a very sudden thing, unexpected in that there will be no previous warning other than that which God has already given in the Scriptures.

He will come to judge, not to give some kind of second chance. That is obvious from our text: ***"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."*** The judging is done, complete, finished.

By what will men be judged? Christ will judge according to the Gospel. That is plain from the passage you memorized from the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Mark: ***"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** (Mark 16:16 NIV)

A human judge issues a sentence according to the laws of the state. If Christ were to judge men according to the Law of the Commandments, no one would be saved. We read in the Psalms: ***"Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you."*** (Psalm 143:2 NIV) And ***"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"*** (Psalm 130:3 KJV)

If we were to be judged according to the Law of God, we would all be lost. Anyone who recognizes his sinfulness will not appeal for the judgment according to the Law and justice of God.

For believers the sentence of condemnation, which under the Law they had deserved by their sins is changed into a sentence of pardon and justification, because by faith they have appropriated to themselves the saving merits of Christ. Their sins are not investigated and published; they are not even mentioned. The Judge does not look at the rags of their sins, but sees only the perfect garment of righteousness, which he offered them in the Gospel, and which they put on by faith.

The believer, as long as he knows himself to be in faith, also knows where he will stand in the Final Judgment, for Christ says: ***"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."*** (John 5:24 NIV) "Yea, Jesus' blood and righteousness My jewels are, my glorious dress. In these before my God I'll stand When I shall reach the heavenly land." (The Lutheran Hymnal 585:1)

Good works are certainly mentioned in our text, but these are not the reason for the sentence which is pronounced. Instead, they are rather the public evidence of that faith by which believers became the sheep of Christ. Good works are the visible fruit of an invisible faith.

This judgment is not an investigation to ascertain who is and who is not a believer. Jesus knows those who believe. Therefore at the very beginning of the judgment the sheep are separated from the goats. Also we know by the faith we now have where we shall stand on the Last Day. The question of eternal life and eternal death is not decided in the Final Judgment. That is decided by a sinner's conversion to Christ and by his continuing in the faith unto the end. He who dies in the faith will stand on the right side of the Judge and will be saved; he who dies in unbelief will stand on the left side and will be lost.

This judgment will pronounce sentence. While this sentence is definitely fixed in each individual case when a man dies and is carried out immediately as far as it concerns the soul, it is formally and publicly pronounced and solemnly declared, and extended and applied also to the body on the Day of Judgment.

The sentence of eternal damnation on all who do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior carries with it punishment as well as reward for the things done in the body. Thus, when a person is damned because of his unbelief, he will also be punished for all the evil he has done in this life; and when a believer is received into heaven, he will be rewarded for all the good he has done on earth. But while punishment is of merit, the reward is of grace.

It will happen, as we sang, that "Jesus comes on clouds triumphant When the heavens shall pass away; Jesus comes again in glory." (The Lutheran Hymnal 56:5)

And so, as we look forward to celebrating his first coming to earth in a few days, "Let us, then, our homage pay, Alleluia! ever singing Till the dawn of endless day." (The Lutheran Hymnal 56:5) May we look forward joyfully to the moment Christ will come! Amen.