

Column

Lord Halifax was a British statesman, serving from 1940 to 1942 as British Ambassador to the United States. During this period, he and Lady Halifax visited Mississippi and were entertained at the Governor's mansion.

Prior to their arrival, a young black maid (the household staff in those days came from the state penitentiary) was overheard asking excitedly, "Has Jesus and wife come yet?"

Well, looking at it from her background and perspective, it made sense! The only "Lord" she knew and acknowledged was the Lord Jesus. So, when she heard that the Lord was coming, of course she assumed it was Jesus and was excited. I dare say you would have been as well.

She has something to teach us as we find ourselves several weeks into season of Advent. On the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, the Church prepares for the celebration of Christ's first

coming at Christmas but also forward to His second at the end of the age.

The excitement of the young maid I have just told about should be ours. After all, the One who came the first time to deal with the human sin problem – to die in our place on the cross – is returning to put all wrongs to rights, abolish death and bring lasting peace to this tired old world. Good news! Again, cause of great expectation and longing!

With that said, I know that over the years our Lord's Second Coming has been the occasion of much wild and foolish speculation. In the 1940s, many were saying that Mussolini, the fascist ruler of Italy, was the anti-Christ. In the 1970s, there was Hal Lindsey's *The Late, Great Planet Earth* in which he predicted Jesus would return in 1988 . . . obviously, he was wrong. In the 1990s, there was a barrage of "Left Behind" books full of fanciful tales of people floating upward, disappearing out of buses and planes.

It is for this reason that the Church's season of Advent is so important. These four Sundays allow

God's people to explore what the Church really teaches on this important subject. These can be reduced to three main points.

First, the Second Coming is an actual historical happening. It is taught in the scriptures, affirmed in the ancient creeds of the Church, and proclaimed and anticipated at every Christian Eucharist: "We eat this bread and drink this cup until He comes."

Secondly, it will be according to prophecy. As all the predictions pertaining to Christ's First Coming found in the Old Testament were accurately and exactly fulfilled, so it will be with those pertaining to His Second Coming found in the New Testament.

Thirdly, His coming will involve judgment. On His final trip to Jerusalem for his last Passover, Jesus went immediately to the Temple where He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and drove out those who sold and bought. His action symbolized that the Temple was under judgment.

Judgment will likewise be a part of Christ's Second Coming. Only on that day, it will be expanded beyond the House of God to include all the living and the dead. All the kindreds of the earth will stand before the great Judge.

Judgment in the Bible has a negative aspect as it tells "the rebel sinner's doom." But it also has a positive. If some are declared in the wrong, others are declared in the right. If some are condemned, others are vindicated.

For Jesus' believing people, judgment will mean that they will be publicly acknowledged as God's sons and daughters. This vindication will NOT be based on their own righteousness, but on Christ's. They will stand before the great judgment seat wearing Christ's own seamless, spotless robe of righteousness. What is true of their King will be true of them. Good news indeed!

During this season, of Advent, let your excitement build. By all means prepare for Christmas. Bake your cakes, buy your gifts, dress your tree, but don't stop there. Take time to look to

the end of the story. The One who came 2000 years ago, comes. Turn from anything that is unworthy of your Christian calling, believe the promises found in the New Testament, and with St. John the Divine in the very last book of the Bible, cry out: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen. Collect for Advent, Book of Common Prayer)

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