

The Coming of Jesus Christ

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by David J. Kiecker

Forward

Dear Brothers in Christ, the assignment given to me for this conference is “The Return Of Christ.” The topic is a very broad and daunting one, but certainly not a topic which has not been approached before or which is unexpected as we approach the year 2000. Because there are a number of articles with the name, “The Return Of Christ,” the title of the essay has been renamed, “The Coming Of Jesus Christ.”

Theologically the topic fits under the heading of Eschatology, (ἔσχατος καιρός), the study of the last things. There are readily available to you any number of excellent expositions on the subject. Names such as Edward Koehler (*Summary of Christian Doctrine*), F. Pieper (*Christian Dogmatics*), T. Laetsch (*The Abiding Word*) are familiar to everyone here. Many of you probably still have your Dogmatic notes from the seminary. To that list could easily be added L. Poellot (*Revelation*), S. Becker (*Revelation*), and W. Mueller (*Revelation*), and others. For a wonderful devotional study of the topic try the Advent section in *Manna*, by Carl Manthey-Zorn translated from the German by John F. Sullivan. Just last year another interesting and clear treatment of the material was made by E. Wendland in an essay entitled, “Jesus Is Coming Again,” which was presented at the Synod Convention held at New Ulm, Minnesota. That essay and eleven other titles are now available from our publishing house in a volume of collected essays entitled, *We Believe In Jesus Christ*. Other sources include the standard texts we commonly use, K. Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, A. Schmoller, *Handkonkordanz*, and one which might not be quite so familiar to some, Gleason L. Archer and G.C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey*. Translations are from the NIV except where noted.

While reading over the list of those who have already written on this subject one wonders whether any more could or should be said. And that is what makes the task daunting. After telling my dilemma to an old friend at the seminary in a telephone call he responded by saying, “If it was worth saying once, it is worth saying twice.” Quoting good source material is “pastorly,” scholarly, and essential research, especially as it pertains to matters of our eternal salvation. It is also humbling to see the depth of wisdom, insight and faith of those who have traveled this road before us.

Rev. D. J. Kiecker

Introduction

The most popular abbreviation over the last few months has been “Y2K.” Undoubtedly you have received letters from your bank, saving institution, or power company informing you that they are Y2K compliant. Everybody is getting ready for the moment when the clock strikes 01-01-00. Is it a fascination, a fixation, or just pulp fiction?

Much has been said in the media about the possible problems associated with 01-01-00. Will all the lights go off, all the computers go down, all the food supplies be halted? Will planes fall out of the sky at one minute after mid-night?

In fact so much has been made of the Y2K event in the secular world that one would think that they believed that Jesus was about to return! Wouldn't that be a twist? But, of course the world doesn't really know or believe in the true Jesus Christ or what he has done or the circumstances under which he will return. (Apparently many don't realize either that the next millennium doesn't really start until 01-01-01!)

Jesus said, "As it was in the, days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (St. Matthew 24:37-39).

At its best the world, full of unregenerate sinners, can only fear the coming wrath of God. Although even the wrath of God they can't fully comprehend. If the world can't properly prepare for the turning of a page on a calendar, how could we expect them to prepare for the Great Day by turning their hearts to the Lord who alone can save them?

While the world stumbles along in spiritual darkness the Children of Light can see things quite clearly. We do not live in fear because the perfect love of Christ fills us and drives out fear. "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love" (I John 4:17,18).

And, let's not forget the promise that still stands in the Noahitic Covenant. "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Genesis 8:22).

One salutary effect of all the world's hype might be that we acknowledge once again that each day we are receiving, as individuals or collectively as a world, another day of God's undeserved grace. Like the Children of Israel in the wilderness we too need to learn to rely on His preserving mercy one day at a time. The Lord alone can and does provide for all our needs of body and soul until he calls us home, be that on the day of our death, or the day before his return or the day of his return. Do you remember how Luther commented on the Fourth Petition? "God surely gives daily bread without our asking, even to all the wicked, but we pray in this petition that he would lead us to realize and receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."

Whereas the world has Y2K to worry about there is a different abbreviation that we Christians have been using for years that brings peace, joy and reassurance as we pass our time waiting for the reappearance of the Great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. That abbreviation is "A.D." Anno Domini, "In the year of our Lord." There is, of course another abbreviation, B.C., "Before Christ." That one reminds us of all the faithful who have gone before us in the Old Testament who looked forward to the first coming of the Savior even as we in the New Testament look forward to his second coming. For the Old Testament believer it was a countdown to the moment of the Savior's birth, the "fulness of time" (Galatians 4:4 KJV). To us it is an adding up of all the years that the Lord has been graciously and patiently waiting for men to repent and believe his Gospel before he comes in judgment because there is another "fulness of time" coming, so to speak.

All believers throughout the history of this world are saying the same thing. The writer to the Hebrews writing after Christ's first coming summed up his (our) place in the history of the world this way.

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.... By faith Abel ... By faith Enoch ... By faith Noah ... By faith Abraham faith Issac ... By faith Jacob ... By faith Joseph ... By faith Moses' parents ... By faith Moses ... By faith the people (of Israel) passed through the Red Sea ... By faith the prostitute Rehab ... And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets ... (Hebrews 11:1-32). All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the county they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:13-16). We, who are the spiritual descendants of those Old Testament believers and of the New Testament believers, have the same yearning, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23).

It is in this regard that this paper is offered. We who are still in the church militant look forward to joining those who are in the church triumphant ire heaven already.

Part One: A Blessed Promise Given: The Lord Will Come

גִּילִי מְאֹד בַּת־צִיּוֹן הִרְיֵעִי בַת יְרוּשָׁלַם
הִנֵּה מֶלֶכְךָ יָבֹא לָךְ צַדִּיק וְנוֹשֵׁעַ הוּא
עֲנִי וְרִכַב עַל־חֲמֹר וְעַל־עֵיֶר בְּוֶאֱתָנוֹת

“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, Your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

Introduction: So much of Scripture and the Christian faith revolves around the theology of the coming or appearing of our Lord. The chief doctrine of the Scriptures is, of course, justification, butt that justification came about because and through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus Christ is an article of faith for the old Testament as well as New Testament believers. In both testaments the Holy Spirit gave people the faith to believe what God had promised.

Before one can speak about the second coming of Christ (which is usually referred to as the Return of Christ) it is necessary to speak about how it was that he came to earth in the first place.

A. The Old Testament Church believed that the Messiah, the Anointed One, would come.

Faith always looks forward to what the Lord has promised. Think for moment of all the passages and prophecies that you know of in the old Testament that relate either to the Messiah’s first coming, his second coming, or both. To say nothing about his coming into the hearts and minds of his children in both the old and New Testaments by faith. No wonder that it has often been said that the whole purpose of the Old Testament is to point to the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Every prophecy of the coming of the Messiah is at the same time a promise, a promise that men needed and that only a loving God could have made and fulfilled.

The first promise/prophecy recorded in Genesis 3:15 was not given in a vacuum. There was a great need that God mercifully wanted to fulfill in making that promise. The story of man’s fall into sin is not a pretty one, but one that sets the stage for the rest of human history until time comes to an end. And, while scholars debate the “hows” and “whys” of the fall, the fact remains that man and woman sinned against God by breaking a covenant agreement that God instituted when he created man and woman.

Before the fall into sin there was no need to look forward to something better than what they presently had. Literally, Adam and Eve had paradise already. They knew God face, to face. He was present with them, and apparently they saw him on a regular basis (Genesis 2:15-25). This was possible, of course, because they were sinless and, therefore, had nothing to fear from God and his justice.

The first unwritten covenant which God made with man is easy enough to understand. God creates the universe, the world and everything in the world for man’s benefit. Adam and Eve know God face to face. They talk to him. He provides for all their needs. He loves them. They are to show their love for him and their appreciation for all he has given them by obeying his simple command, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16, 17).

Sin, that is, disobedience to God, changed all that. A shiver goes down the believer’s spine when he reads, “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it” (Genesis 3:6).

A rereading of Genesis 3 is a sad experience, especially the summary in verse 23, “So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden” Now there would be hard labor, suffering, pain, sin and death until we “return to the ground, since from it you were taken for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19). “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

God knew man’s heart. By nature they have no faith in him. God knew what men’s answer would be to the prospect of the judgment and death. Man would seek to avoid it. So the Lord God said, “He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live, forever,” in eternal sin and separation from me (Genesis 3:22).

Isn’t it strange and odd that at the dawn of the second millennium since God sent his Son to save mankind from hard labor, suffering, pain, sin, and death that man still dreams of saving himself from the ravages of sin. With the advances in human knowledge, in chemistry, and genetic engineering he wants to reach out his own hand to a “tree of life” of his own making and recreate himself to live forever. Then he won’t have to face God as his judge, he mistakenly thinks. The words, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:22), have an ominous ring in our day and age.

Here is the need. A release from the curse of death and eternal separation from God. Man’s sin caused this need to come into being. Man could not fulfill his own need.

God in love promised to fulfill the need for man by making another covenant with man. A Gospel Covenant in which man would do nothing. God himself would make and keep the covenant. Man had lost paradise. God would give it back to him. Adam and Eve were cast out of their earthly Garden of Eden. But, God gave them faith to believe his promise of the “Coming One” who would take away their sins and earn for them eternal life.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15). God promised to do what man could not do. By his power through the Coming One he would crush Satan’s head. He would do this solely out of love for fallen mankind. This was the great covenant promise of the Old Testament which all believers clung to in faith.

Many think that when Eve bore Cain and said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man” (Genesis 4:2), that she was indicating her belief at the time that Cain was that promised Deliverer, a man from God. Cain, however, turned out to be nothing more than a common sinner and murderer.

The Second Adam was the one upon whom her hopes for forgiveness of sins and eternal life depended. The Second Adam would come in due time but, not during her lifetime. The Second Adam was Jesus Christ (Romans 5:15-19). Later, St. Paul would capture the hope that Adam and Eve could only envision, “The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth, and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as He was to have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:47-49).

The Holy Spirit worked through the promise/prophecies which followed to create and sustain faith in the hearts of God's Old Testament people. Which is no more than saying that the Old Testament Gospel promises worked in the same way as those in the New Testament. What is true now was also true then. "But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:16, Isaiah 53:1).

If it were possible, St. Peter could have lived and spoken a thousand years earlier' his words would have been just as true and powerful. "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ ... For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:16, 21).

One promise/prophecy followed another in the Old Testament. Some were earlier and some were later. Some were clear and obvious, others weren't so obvious, at least not to the unbelievers. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Passages come to mind like Psalm 22 ("My God, My God, why have you forsaken me ..."), Isaiah 7 (The virgin birth), Isaiah 9 ("... For to us a child is born ..."), Isaiah 53 ("He was pierced for our transgressions ..."), (Jeremiah 23 ("I will raise up to David a righteous branch ..."), Daniel 12 ("But at that time your people-everyone whose name is found written in the book-will be delivered ..."). The "Day of the Lord" prophecies from Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are another category which could be looked at. And, of course, Job 19 ("I know that my Redeemer lives ..."). Many other passages could be quoted. (In fact, one could just browse through the Historic lessons or all three ILCW Old Testament readings for the Advent Season for more.)

Some have suggested that the Prophets understood little if anything about a Coming One and what he would do. It might be well for them to read again, "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and the circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things" (1 Peter 1:10-12).

God's promises are always clear and forthright. Man's understanding is always clouded by sin. On top of this not every believer had or has the same depth of understanding. We need to keep in mind that the Old Testament believers were not concerned with a "return" of the Lord, but of his coming in the first place. At the same time, whether they were aware of it or not, the vocabulary that the Holy Spirit caused these men to use reflected a certain kind of ambiguity. Although the Old Testament believers might not have been aware of it, some passages referred exclusively to his first coming, others referred to his second coming and some referred to both. We can see that as we quickly browse through a number of the promise/prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the coming of the Messiah.

There are those passages which seem to speak about God himself coming. And there are those passages which seem to say that God would send someone else.

Will the Coming One establish a visible, temporal, and earthly kingdom or an invisible, eternal, and heavenly one?

Will the Coming One bring condemnation or salvation in the Judgment? "The Redeemer will come (בֹּאֵ) to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins" (Isaiah 59:20).

“Surely the day is coming (בּוֹא); it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:1, 2).

Will the Coming One arrive with great glory and power or with humility and weakness?

Will the Coming One be a suffering Messiah coming in weakness and humility or will he come with great power and glory to bring suffering on his enemies? “See, the Sovereign Lord comes (בּוֹא) with power, and his arm rules for him ... He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers his lambs in his arms” (Isaiah 40:10, 11).

Will the Coming One be a servant or a King? “Here is my servant (עֶבֶד), whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1). “See, your king (מֶלֶךְ) comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey ... ” (Zechariah 9:9).

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes (בּוֹא) to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his” (Genesis 49:10). “See, the Lord is coming (בּוֹא) with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire” (Isaiah 66:15).

Many similar apparent disparities could be mentioned.

While the answers to these questions might seem obvious to us at this point in time, the fact is that, by and large, the answers weren’t so obvious to many in the Old Testament times right down to the coming of Jesus. We read about a visit Jesus had with a member of the Jewish ruling council named Nicodemus. “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things” (St. John 3:10).

However, the one thing that they were sure of was that the Lord was coming.

B. While the Old Testament believers had a faith that the Messiah, their Lord and Savior who would come someday, they also had a firm belief that he was already with them.

In the story of Cain and Abel, (Genesis 4), for example, the Lord “looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor” (Genesis 4:4, 5). The Lord was present, saw what Cain had done, speaks to him directly. “Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel’ ” (Genesis 4:9)? He “comes” to Cain and when Cain does not repent he brings an immediate judgment/punishment upon him.¹

In the story of Noah (Genesis 6-8), “The Lord saw (רָאָה) how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become” (Genesis 6:5). Noah “walked with God” (הלך). Even if this is understood as not being a physical walking next to Noah, it still expresses the close and intimate nature of God’s coming and being with Noah.

We see this same thing again after the flood. Noah built an altar and sacrificed some clean animals and birds on it. “The Lord smelled (רָיַח) the pleasing aroma.” Granted that Moses is using anthropomorphic language, it still indicates the close presence of the Lord.

¹ Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* p.861 states, “Since Semitic forms of speech are more concrete, there are not words for ‘presence’ and ‘coming’ in Heb. For the verbs ‘to be present’ and ‘to come,’ however, there are several other terms in addition to הָיָה and בּוֹא.”

Any number of examples could be drawn from the story of Abraham, from his calling to his death (Genesis 12-25). One such example begins, “The Lord appeared (הָרָא) to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre” (Genesis 18:1).

One more story that can not be omitted would be that of Jacob wrestling with God (Genesis 32).

Examples of the presence of the Lord (of his coming and being) with his people occur throughout the Old Testament. Some of the most striking occur with the Children of Israel in the Exodus.

Moses and the burning bush comes to mind immediately. “When the Lord saw that he (Moses) had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses, Moses’ ” (Exodus 3:4)!

As with the other examples there is personal and close contact with Moses as an individual when the Lord “comes” to him.

Another excellent example is the glory cloud. “By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people” (Genesis 13:20-22).

The giving of the Law on Mount Sinai to Moses is another “coming” of the Lord. “The Lord descended on it (Mount Sinai) in fire” (Exodus 19:18).

“Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exodus 24:9-11).

In the Tent of Meeting “the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Genesis 33:11) and “My (God’s) presence will go with you....” Yet the Lord, for Moses the sinner’s sake, withheld seeing his full glory presence from him. “But,” he (God) said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (Genesis 33:20).

A list of the various theophanies, visions and dreams could be made. They would show the same thing, namely, that God not only was “coming” at some future time, but that he was already present with his people all the time.

It is all summed up in Psalm 139:7, 8: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths you are there.”

The Lord God came in judgment on unbelievers already in the Old Testament and on other occasions brought salvation to his children. These were all “foretastes” of the day when the promised Coming One would appear. “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come (בֹּא) to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom, you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty” (Malachi 3:1).

In fact St. Paul commented on this very thing in 1 Corinthians, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

What we always need to keep in mind is that the Lord in his grace and mercy always provided a time of grace, a “gift” time, to people to confess the error of their ways, to seek the Lord’s forgiveness and to receive his blessings.

In the meantime the believers themselves were often the butt of jokes and physical persecution and in some cases they were stoned, beaten or even killed. No wonder that the

church cried out, “How long, O Lord” (Psalm 13:1 et al.)!? It was difficult for the faithful believers to comprehend all that they would have to endure before God was going to come and save them.

As for the unbelievers, what was said at the beginning of this paper continued, “People were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage ... That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (St. Matthew 24:38, 39).

Conclusion: In this section we have attempted to show that from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden and throughout the whole of the Old Testament the believers were looking forward to the coming of the Lord and at the same time they were keenly aware that the Lord was present with them already, sometimes even in visible fashion.

Part Two: A Divine Purpose Fulfilled: The Lord Has Come

ἐγὼ πεπίστευκα ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐρχόμενος

“I believe that you are the Christ,, the Son of God, who was to come into the world” (St. John 11:27).

Introduction: The Old Testament activity of God would culminate when the Messiah (מָשִׁיחַ), or the Christ (χριστός), as he is called in the New Testament, would come to his people. This is usually called Jesus’ First Advent or Coming. The coming of Christ marked a great change in how God dealt with his people. Before the incarnation (ἐνσαρκί) there were only the promise/ prophecies. Now there was fulfillment. However, God’s fulfillment of his eternal divine purpose did not automatically ensure either man’s clarity of understanding nor man’s faith in what God had done.

The Apostle Peter speaking to the Jewish crowds in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost morning said, “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:22-24).

A. The Lord has come but, from where did he come?

Ask any Sunday School child. at Christmas where Jesus came from and he will tell you very simply, “Jesus came from heaven.” Oh, that the Lord would grant each one of us here such a firm and unquestioning faith.

For the most part the full meaning of eternity and heaven will remain great mysteries to our human minds until we one day see God face to face in the heavenly realms ourselves. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

This much can be said, there are a number of beautiful descriptions of heaven in the Scriptures. But, we always need to remember that human words, language, and intelligence are inadequate to fully describe and comprehend the supernatural world of God.

One glimpse into eternity and heaven is the description in Revelation 4.

At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back ... Day and night they never stopped saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord

God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.” ... and (they) worshipped him who lives for ever and ever. They lay down their crowns before the throne and say, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Revelation 4:2-11).

When God created this world and all the universe he also created time. From our perspective on this small planet the sun, moon, and stars “serve as signs, to mark seasons and days and year” (Genesis 1:14).

We are bound by time and space so long as we live. However, when we die our souls will leave time and enter eternity. “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

When “Jesus came from heaven,” as the Sunday School child answered, Jesus left eternity and entered the realm of finite time and space. He left behind unimaginable glory, honor, and power. He was made like one of us. “Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

The doctrines of the incarnation and the exinanition are familiar to everyone here. And yet, they remain true mysteries as well. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9).

But, again, if you were to ask that Sunday School child, “And why did Jesus come to earth?” He would quickly respond, “Jesus came because he love; me and wanted to save me.” It is no mystery to him.

Oh, that we would always give such a clear, simple and profound confession of our faith!

B. God sent his Son.

God had determined when the promise/prophecies of the Old Testament would come to pass. “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:5).

God had determined who would come and fulfill the promise/prophecies of the Old Testament. “The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:3; see also Colossians 1:15-20).

God had determined how the promised/prophesied one would come. “He (God) appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).

And, God had determined what the promised/prophesied one would accomplish. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him” (Romans 5:9).

All this seems perfectly clear to us at this vantage point in history. We have heard the message of our salvation and believed.

C. However, at the actual time of Jesus Christ's coming false notions abounded concerning the Messiah's coming and the kingdom that he would establish.

One of the most common misconceptions becomes obvious at the feeding of the 5,000. The crowds want to make him a "Bread King." "After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and *make him king* by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself" (St. John 6:14, 15).

Another misunderstanding is shown in St. Luke 19. "While they were listening to this, he (Jesus) went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear *at once* (παραχρήμα)" (St. Luke 19:11).

When this is taken in connection with the words of the crowds at the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday it shows that, in many people's minds, some sort of Messianic kingdom was about to be established right there and then in Jerusalem itself. "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes (ὁ ἐρχόμενος) in the name of the Lord" (St. Matthew 21:9; Cf. Psalm 118:26).

The chief priests and the leaders of the people were indignant, jealous, envious and more than a little concerned that a rebellion against them and against their Roman masters would begin. They feared that the country would be turned into turmoil and they would lose their positions, power, and prestige. "If we let him go like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (St. John 11:48).

The request of the mother of Zebedee's sons reveals that at least she, and perhaps some of the disciples, thought, that *the coming kingdom would be like other earthly kingdoms*, where powerful men exercise authority over the weaker ones. "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom" (St. Matthew 20:21).

And, just before Jesus ascended into heaven the disciples still had trouble understanding the nature of Jesus' coming and what he accomplished, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6)?

These verses are not meant to belittle the disciples. They and most other Jews had many preconceived notions about the Messiah's person, the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and the coming of the Messiah in general which were just plain wrong.

D. Weakness of faith and lack of understanding is one thing, hardness of heart is something else entirely. The strongest opposition to Jesus as the Messiah sent from the heavenly Father did not come from simple misunderstandings. It never does. The real problem lay in the lack of faith. Some of the saddest words in all the New Testament are these, "He came (ἦλθεν) to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (St. John 1:11).

When the human heart is full of pride in man's accomplishments and wisdom then there is no room for faith. St. Paul wrote, "But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23, 24).

It would not make any difference to the stubborn and obstinate whom God would send. Jesus said, “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came (ἤλθεν) eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and “sinners” ’ ” (St. Matthew 11:18).

It would not make any difference to the stubborn and obstinate what God would do. As Jesus said in the Parable of The Rich Man and Poor Lazarus, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (St. Luke 16:31).

“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: ‘Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere; ‘He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn-and I would heal them.’ Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him” (St. John 12:38; Romans 10:16).

Earlier John the Baptist as part of his ministry to prepare the way for Christ had condemned the many Pharisees and Sadducees who did not believe. “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath (οὐρανῶν)” (St. Matthew 3:7).

E. On the other hand there certainly was a great deal of anticipation among many that the Lord God was about to fulfill his promise and send his Messiah into the world.

This “holy anticipation,” if you will, had begun with the Old Testament believers. For them the question was not concerning a “return” of the Lord but of his coming in the first place. The New Testament writers, both Evangelists and Apostles, were keenly aware of their link to the past and the promise/prophecies of the Old Testament.

The writers of the New Testament extensively quoted the Old Testament as proof that the divine purpose was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ and none other.

There are more than 140 direct Old Testament references to the coming of Jesus Christ and his kingdom in the four Gospels alone. And, more than 200 other references in the rest of the New Testament. A person may wish to add to that list a vast number of other allusions to the old Testament. The references start with the familiar from St. Matthew’s Gospel, chapter one verse 23. “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Isaiah 7:14), and go right through to the last reference in Revelation 21:7, “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (Ezekiel 11:20, quoting 2 Samuel 7:14).²

The story for our purposes begins in St. Matthew’s Gospel chapter one, verse one and following with the genealogical list, “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ ... ” (St. Matthew 1:1) or if one were to follow St. Luke’s Gospel, “He (Jesus) was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli ... ” going all the way back to Adam and his creator, God (St. Luke 3:23-38).

While not quoting here all the names of these Old Testament members of Christ’s church (over 120 souls are mentioned by name) it is worth remembering that these lists are incomplete.

² Gleason L. Archer and G.C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey*. The book includes both Hebrew and Greek Septuagint and the corresponding Greek New Testament texts and additional commentary. It is well worth looking into.

What is given in outline fashion are the names of heads of households or others such as Rahab who believed in the “Coming One (οἱ ἐρχομένοι).”

We ought not forget that these people had believing spouses, children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters and friends and business associates, slaves and servants whose names are not mentioned here but, whose names are in the Book of Life (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 20:12) that will be opened on the last day. A typical example of that would be Abraham’s trusted chief servant in his household, Eliezer of Damascus, not to mention other gentile peoples that also knew of the promise/prophecies of Gad apparently through contact with evangelizing Old Testament believers. Think of those who repented in great Nineveh because of Jonah, or people like Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, or those who came to faith in the true God during the time of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, or those who came in contact with Esther and her family, or the Wise Men who came from the East ... The list goes on and on of those who believed. All these waited expectantly for the coming of the Messiah. These were all waiting and looking forward to what God would one day do to save them. In fact one could say that faith presupposes waiting for something to occur.

As the time for the coming of the Lord (“the fullness of time” KJV, Galatians 4:4) approached, the level of anticipation increased.

One very telling verse occurs in St. Luke 3:15: “The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ” (Messiah) (cf. St. John 1:20). But, we get ahead of ourselves.

When the angel Gabriel appears to Mary he says, “You will be with child; and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High (cf. Genesis 14:19ff, Hebrews 7:1ff. “Melchizedek”). The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever (εἰς τὸ αἰὼν/naï); his kingdom will never end (οὐκ ἐπιλήσεται)” (St. Luke 1:31-34).

Mary is not told whether Jesus’ reign will begin immediately or at some future time only that he is the promised Messiah. And concerning his kingdom she is not told whether his reign will be visible or invisible. Nothing is mentioned of the Final Judgment nor of the glory nor humiliation of her son. Nothing of where this kingdom will be located. Only one facet of that “gem” is revealed, the kingdom will be an eternal one. Mary must wait in faith.

Nowhere in the Old Testament Scriptures did the Lord say that all the promise prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom would be fulfilled at one time and one place.

(“Kingdom” (basileia) here as elsewhere in the New Testament when referring to Christ’s kingdom means the exercising of his rule through the Gospel. See also the Parables of Jesus which refer to the kingdom of God or of heaven.)

It is in the appearance of an angel to Joseph that we are given the first glimpse in the New Testament of what that Gospel rule will accomplish. “*He will save his people from their sins*” (St. Matthew 1:21).

The angel’s prophecy continued, “They will call him, ‘Immanuel’-which means ‘*God with us*’ ” (St. Matthew 1:23). Notice that here as in many of the Old Testament references the nearness or closeness of the Lord God and/or his Messiah is emphasized. He is always with his people ruling in their hearts with his Gospel.

We turn to the appearance of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds. In these verses the Lord shows that in the future there will be an accounting of all the people, that God’s will is that all people know of it, that he has provided a Savior in the coming judgment, and that the Savior

is none other than Christ who is Lord, that is, God himself. “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be *for all the people*. Today in the city of David a *Savior* has been born to you, he is *Christ the Lord*” (St. Luke 2:10,11). The will of God to save mankind is mentioned again in Verse 14, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace to men on whom his favor rests.*”

Simeon’s song in the temple reveals still more about the universal character of the kingdom which Christ came to establish, “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel*” (St. Luke 2:30-33). If one speaks of salvation, then there is also a condemnation from which people need to be saved.

Even aged Anna added something when she “spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” She and many others understood that there would be a final “day of the Lord,” spoken about by the prophets and that on that day the Lord would strike down all his enemies and redeem or save his people (Jerusalem) (St. Luke 2:38). No one traveled a greater distance to see the Lord who had come to earth from heaven than the Magi. These gentiles were willing to make their long journey because they believed that the child king sent from above was their savior as well, for they came “to worship him” (St. Matthew 2:2). An eager heart does not measure cost or distance or hardship to reach its goal.

However, how sad it is to be so close to the truth which alone can save you and not believe it. That is the story of King Herod’s and Jerusalem’s reaction to what the Magi asked concerning the child. “When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written’ ” (St. Matthew 2:3, 4).

The Jews not only knew and believed (not saving faith) that such a Messiah would be born, they knew where he was going to be born, and what he was going to be, namely, “a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel” (St. Matthew 2:6). The only reason that such a wonderful prophecy would bring fear to their hearts and the heart of King Herod is that they also knew that they themselves were not right with God and that with this promised/prophesied child’s coming, in some fashion or another, a terrible judgment and punishment would come on them. Theirs was a miserable and unholy anticipation of the coming wrath of God.

By God’s grace others did see, hear, and believe. When the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus asking, “Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else” (St. Matthew 11:3)? Jesus answered by paraphrasing Isaiah 35:4-6. “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.” He thereby identified himself as the fulfillment of what Isaiah spoke by inspiration, “Your God will come (אֱלֹהִים) with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf, ... (etc.)” This did not mean that the Messiah was to be only and forever a great healer of earthly maladies. These miracles were the signs (σημείων), as the Apostle John referred to them (St. John 4:54; 20:30), which identified Jesus as the Son of God who came into the world.

In a number of instances people recognized that Jesus was the “Coming One” almost immediately, others recognized him later on. (οἱ ἐρχόμενοι is used at least 18 times in the New Testament to refer to Jesus.)

Some of the happiest words of the New Testament were being fulfilled. “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of

God-Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and make his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (St. John 1:12-14). The Gospels record how a number of Jesus' first disciples viewed his coming, as the Christ of God, from the beginning.

St. John 1:40: "Andrew, Simon Peter's, brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah,' (that is, the Christ)."

St. John 1:45: "Philip, like Andrew and Peter was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathaniel and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote-Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' "

St. John 1:49: "Then Nathaniel declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.' "

St. Matthew 16:16: "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' "

St. John 20:28: "Thomas said to him [Jesus], 'My Lord and my God.' "

There was no doubt in their minds when they spoke those words that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise/prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus was the "Coming One" (οἰκονομοῦς).

Recall again Martha's confession, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Sometimes testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the "Coming One" comes from less obvious sources.

The gentile woman at the well in Samaria comes to mind. "The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming' (ἐρχεται). When he comes, he will explain everything to us.' Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he' " (St. John 4:25).

Apparently, at least some people in the crowds at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem felt that Jesus was the "Coming One" for they shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is he who comes (οἰκονομοῦς) in the name of the Lord" (St. Matthew 21:9)!

But one who seems to understand the best and cling to Jesus in faith in spite of the most agonizing circumstances is none other than the thief on the cross next to Jesus, "Then he said to him, 'Jesus, remember me whom you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise' " (St. Luke 23:42, 43).

It is ironic that God caused even his Son's enemies to testify about him and speak truths about his coming and his kingdom that they were not conscious of speaking. The high priest Caiaphas said to the Sanhedrin, "Do you not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one" (St. John 11:49-53).

And, who can forget Caiaphas' infamous inquisition of Jesus. " 'I charge you under oath by the living God; tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied, 'But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming (οἰκονομοῦς) on the clouds of heaven" (St. Matthew 26:63, 64).

Even Satan and his devils recognized that Jesus, and alone, was the “Coming One” and what his coming meant for them, although their testimony is disavowed because it comes from the mouth of liars. Consider Satan’s question during the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, “If you are the Son of God” (St. Matthew 4:3)? Or, the plea of the demons, “ ‘What do you want with us, Son of God?’ they shouted. ‘Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?’ ” (St. Matthew 8:29,30). St. James wrote, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder” (James 2:19).

F. If all this evidence was not enough to convince someone that the divine purpose was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus came into the flesh let us not forget that Jesus himself stated fully and clearly who he was and what he had come to do, namely, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (St. Luke 19:10).

This Jesus would do by fulfilling all of the Commandments of God for us in our stead. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (St. Matthew 5:17).

This Jesus would do by handing himself over to his enemies so that his innocent suffering and death would pay for the sins of the world. “I am the good shepherd ... and I lay down my life for the sheep” (St. John 10:14, 15).

The work or office that Christ came to fulfill is usually divided into three parts or phases. The first is his prophetic office. As Jesus said concerning himself, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (St. Luke 4:18). The second is his high priestly office. Jesus said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (St. Matthew 20:28). And the third is his kingly office. “My kingdom is not of this world ... ”, but “ ... I am a king” (St. John 18:36, 37).

It is under the heading of the kingly office of Christ that the three-fold kingdom of power, grace and glory he established is revealed. (A full discussion of these truths can be found in Pieper and elsewhere. These teachings are only mentioned here in passing to round out this part of the essay.)

Jesus Christ defeated Satan and his evil kingdom. “[Jesus Christ] through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

“The New Testament age began with the coming of Christ. ‘The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work’ (John 3:8). During his earthly ministry Jesus announced, ‘The prince of this world now stands condemned’ (St. John 16:11). By his death and resurrection Jesus disarmed the power and authorities’ (Colossians 2:15).”³

Conclusion: All of the promise/prophecies of the old Testament which spoke of the Messiah’s coming visibly, and with humility and weakness were fulfilled in the First Advent or Coming of Jesus Christ, “who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, he descended into hell, the third day he rose again from death and ascended into heaven.” (His entire state of humiliation and the first three steps in his exaltation) He thereby earned our salvation and established an eternal kingdom for our benefit.

³ Wayne D. Mueller, *Revelation*, p.193.

Part Three: A Glorious Privilege Anticipated: The Lord Will Come Again

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h]te.

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am” (St. John 14:3).

Introduction: In the last section we spoke about the First Coming of Jesus Christ, or his First Advent. In this section we will look at his Second Coming or Advent which is commonly called the “Return of Christ.” Ever since the day of Jesus’ Ascension when the angels said to the Apostles, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go unto heaven,” believers have been waiting for Jesus Christ to reappear and take us home to be with him for all eternity above.

A. The New Testament Writers refer to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ with a special vocabulary of Greek words and expressions.

Just as the Old Testament prophets searched over their own words to see what God had revealed to them it is still necessary that we diligently search the Scriptures too.

1. The most commonly used word to describe the Second Advent is *parousi/a* and its cognitive verb *pa/reimi*.

The basic meaning of the word is “to be present” as in passages like 2 Corinthians 10:10. Where certain despisers of St. Paul said that, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but *in person* (*h9 papousi/a*, “bodily presence”) he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing. Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions *when we are present*” (*paro/ntej*).

The other natural meaning of the word occurs in passages like St. Matthew 26:50. “Friend, why *have you come* (*pa/rei*) ... ”

Or, as in St. Luke 13:1: “Now *there were some present* (*parh=san*) ... ” Most frequently these words, are used of the of Messiah’s Second Advent in glory to judge the world:

St. Matthew 24:3: “Tell us,” they said, “When will this happen, and when will be the sign of your *coming* (*parousi/aj*) and the end of the age.”

1 Corinthians 15:23: “But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, *when he comes* (*e0n th| parousi/a|* lit. “in the coming”) those who belong to him.”

2 Peter 3:4: “They (the scoffers) will say, “Where is this ‘*coming*’ (*th=j parousi/aj*) promised?”^{4,5}

⁴ Surprisingly, [cf. Schmoller, *Handkonkordanz*] the word *παρουσία* is not used in the book of Revelation.

⁵ Note that the common Greek words for “return,” *ὑποστρέφω*, *ἀνακάμπω*, *ἀναστρέφω*, *ἀναλύω*, *ἐπιστρέφω*, *ἐπανάρχομαι*, *ἐπανάγω* are not used in any New Testament book to describe the second coming of Christ [cf. Louw & Nida Greek English Lexicon]. The reason might be

2. ε0πιφα/νεια and the cognate verb ε0πιφαι/νειν “Appearing, appearance,” “to appear”

They are used in connection with Jesus’ first coming on earth.

2 Timothy 1:9,10: “This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through *the appearing* (φανερωγει=σαν) of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Also in combination with παρoυσι/αj. Which is a pleonastic use since both words have the same meaning. 2 Thessalonians 2:8: “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy *by the splendor of his coming*” (th|= ε0πιφανεi/a th=j παρoυσι/αj lit. “the appearance of his coming”).

The word is also used in connection with his Second Advent.

1 Timothy 6:14: “To keep this command without spot or blame until the *appearing* (ε0πιφανεi/αj) of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Timothy 4:1, 8: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who will judge, the living and the dead, and *in view of his appearing* (ε0πιφα/νειαν αυ0του= lit. “when he appears”) and his kingdom ...” But also to all who have longed for his *appearing* (same).”

Titus 2:13: “For the grace of God that brings salvation *has appeared* (ε0πεφα/νη) to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope-the *appearing* (ε0πιφα/νειν) of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Colossians 3:4: “When Christ, who is your life appears (φανερωqh=), then you will also appear (φανερωqh/σεση) with him in glory.”

1 Peter 5:4: “And when the Chief Shepherd appears (φανερωγε/ντοj), you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

1 John 2:28: “And now, dear children, continue in him, so that *when he appears* (ε0α\νη φανερωqh= |), we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming (ε0νη th| παρoυσι/α).”

1 John 3:2: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that *when he appears* (ε0α\νη φανερωqh= |) we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”⁶

3. ε1ρxομαι “To come” (A&G “The idea of coming is even plainer in connection with the coming of the Son of Man from heaven, the return of Jesus from his home in heaven.”)

because each of those words always infers that a physical distance exists between where the person was and the place to which he is to return. This has the potential to conflict with Jesus’ promises that he is with us always. However, it would be consistent with the understanding of the Old Testament believers who were waiting for his coming the first time and at the same time were being reassured that he was right there with them all the time.

In passing it should be noted that the phrase, the “Return of Christ,” could just as easily be used to describe Jesus returning to heaven after his work here on earth was completed.

⁶ ἐπιφάνεια or its emphatic forms are regularly used to denote an appearances of Jesus after his Resurrection and before his Ascension.

St. John 14:3: “And if I go, and prepare a place for you, I will come back (e1rxomai c. pa/lin lit. “I will come *again*”) and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (Here would fit all those passages which refer to Jesus as the “Coming One (o9 e0rxo/menoi),” such as Mt 11:3; Lk 7:10, 20; Jn 6:14; 11:27; At 19:4; Hb 10:37; Rv 1:4, 8 ; 4:8; 11:17 etc.)

th=j e01eu/sewj as a textual variant occurs in St. Luke 23:42: “Remember me in the day of your *coming*.”

4. h3kw “Have come, be present” Used of the final tribulation.

St. Matthew 23:36: “I tell you the truth, all this *will come* upon this generation.”

St. Luke 19:43: “The days *will come* upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you in on every side.”

5. h9me/ra “Day” The day of God’s final judgment.

St. Luke 17:30: “It will be just like this (marrying and giving in marriage) on the *day* the Son of Man is revealed.”

Jesus is the Lord of this day.

2 Peter 3:10: “But the *day of the Lord* (h9me/ra kuri/ou) will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”

1 Corinthians 5:5: “So that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the *day* of the Lord.”

1 Thessalonians 5:4: “But, you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this *day* should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and of the day.”

2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2: “Concerning the *coming* (th=j parousi/aj) of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by prophecy, report, or letter supposedly to have come from us, saying that the *day* (h9 h9me/ra) of the Lord has already come.”

6. mara\n a0qa= or mara/na qa/ for the Hebrew מָרָא אֵתָא

1 Corinthians 16:22: “Our Lord has come” or “Come, O Lord” A transliteration from the Aramaic used by St. Paul without further explanation.

7. o9ra/w, o0fqh/somai pass. “become visible, appear”

Hebrew 9:28: “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.”

8. kairo/j “a definite or fixed time”

St. Matthew 8:29: “What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before *the appointed time*?”

1 Corinthians 4:5: “He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. *At that time* each will receive his praise from God.”

9. kri/ma, kri/nein, kri/sij, krithrion

St. Matthew 10:15: I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day *of judgment* than for that town.”

St. Matthew 12:36: “But I tell you that men will have to give an account on the day *of judgment* for every careless word they have spoken.”

B. The New Testament Church believes that Jesus Christ will come again.

The Scriptures clearly teach a real, visible and inevitable coming of Jesus to this world a second time. “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, 29).

The passages in the New Testament that pertain to the Second Advent are promise/prophecies, much like the promise/prophecies made to the Old Testament believers. In both cases a great deal of information is given concerning the event, but not everything. In both cases the believers must wait patiently in faith for the Lord to come to his people.

There are three sources of information concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the Old Testament promise/prophecies where they pertained to it, the statements of Jesus, and the writings of the Apostles. Most of the time the three sources come together to fill in information for each other. From our perspective in the New Testament it is easier to understand the meaning of the promise/prophecies of the Old Testament because we already know which passages or parts of them refer to his exinanition and which refer to his exaltation. A number of these passages we studied in the first section of this essay.

1. Jesus Christ himself made promise/prophecies about his coming again. Many of these promise/prophecies are to be found in or in connection with his parables.

Depending upon how the parables are numbered and divided there are about 40 of them to be found in the pages of the New Testament.

They could be divided into two major groupings. The first group are those parables which speak about what the church must do to prepare itself for his second coming. The second group takes up the matter of the judgment itself. The separation of the believers from the unbelievers is the most common theme. The second group is the one which we want to look at here briefly.

After telling the Parable of the Weeds, for example, Jesus gives this meaning, “The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are the angels.... The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (St. Matthew 13:39-42).

The Parable of the Net Jesus interprets this way: “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace ... ” (St. Matthew 13:49, 50).

It is interesting to note that beginning with St. Matthew 21 (the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem), eight of the twenty-three parables Matthew records are from the last week before Jesus was crucified: Chapter 21: The Two Sons, and The Tenants; Chapter 22: The Wedding Banquet; Chapter 24: The Fig Tree, and The Faithful and Wise Servant; Chapter 25: The Ten Virgins, The Talents (Minas), and The Sheep And The Goats.

The last of these parables begins, “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” (St. Matthew 25:31-33). As is plainly seen from this example, Christ’s return in glory; the reality and accompaniment of the angels; the final judgment; and separation of believers from the unbelievers will be real and actual. The metaphor is in the picture of the shepherd dividing the sheep and the goats. There will be no shepherd and no physical dividing of sheep from goats on the day when Christ returns.

2. Jesus also makes clear statements about his second coming apart from the parables. The inspired New Testament writers echo the facts about the coming of Christ. “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:16).

One very useful source of information for the promise/prophecies about the end times is St. Matthew 24, the “Signs of the End of the Age” chapter. (I have not included the whole text of St. Matthew 24 here although it would be helpful to reread it at your convenience.)

Some of the signs are unusually catastrophic events in nature such as with earthquakes, floods, famines, and “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken” (St. Matthew 24:29).

Some of the signs have to do with unusually catastrophic events among men and nations, wars and rumors of wars, “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Some of the signs are found in the visible church such as false teachers, hypocrisy, heresy, all sorts of anti-Christian activity and the coming of the antichrist himself (1 John 2:18, 22, 23; 2 John 7; 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4).

Are we the only ones watching the headlines? Global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, the spread of the AIDS virus, high school massacres, child abuse, sexual promiscuity, floods famines and earthquakes; and in the church, indifference to sound doctrine and a general falling away. O Lord, how long?

These signs of the times remind us to keep watch. “No one knows the day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, not the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come” (St. Mark 13:32, 33). We might feel that the Coming of Jesus Christ is immanent because all the signs seem to be fulfilled just now in history, but St. Peter could already write so many years ago, “The end of all things is near” (1 Peter 4:7).

When Jesus comes, His Coming will be visible. “This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:9, 11). All will see him at once when He appears. “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” (St. Matthew 24:30).

All his “angels (will be) with him” (St. Matthew 25:31).

All the bodies of the dead will be raised to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things he has done in his body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10). At his arrival there will be a final judgment in which the believers will be separated (a0fori/zei) from the unbelievers (St. Matthew 25:32).

The only reason for Christ’s not coming already is that he is a gracious God who gives a time grace for people to repent and come to faith in him. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness, but He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

His Coming will be final one and permanent, that is, for eternity. “And he will reign for ever and ever (kai\ basileu/sei ei0j tou\j ai0w=naj tw=n ai0w=nwn)” (Revelation 11:15).

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (St. Matthew 24:14).

Only unbelievers need fear the coming day of the Lord and the judgment. The believers have been justified by faith in Christ’s righteousness already, are at peace with God, and are certain of their salvation. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, “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).⁷

C. At the same time the New Testament Church awaits the coming of our great God and Lord on Judgment day, we also believe that the Lord Jesus comes to us here and now and is with us already.

In a general sense Jesus is always nearby and close to his people. He is never far away, just as he was with his Old Testament people. It is comforting to know Jesus’ promises especially when times are dark and uncertain in our lives. “For where two or three come to together in my name, there am I with them” (St. Matthew 18:20), “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (St. Matthew 28:20).

St. Paul knew the comfort of Jesus’ promises so he wrote, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any power, neither height nor depth, not anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39).

Moreover, there is an intimate union of Christ and his church, that is, you and me, right here and right now. “For we are members of his body” (Ephesians 5:30).

And it was in that light that Jesus prayed in his high priestly prayer, “I in them and you in me, that they may be one as we are one.... Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me-before the creation of the world” (St. John 17:23, 24).

However, in the Sacrament the Lord Jesus Christ goes a step farther and comes to us and is present with us locally. “This is my body given for you ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (St. Luke 22:19, 20). “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for

⁷ For a Confessional Statement see Augsburg Confession Article XVII.

which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ. And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ.”

In these ways our Lord Jesus Christ has come to us in the past, is coming to us daily and ultimately will reappear on the last day.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. The day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation ... ” (2 Peter 3:15).

“Even so, Lord Jesus, Come!”

“Yes, I am coming soon” (Revelation 22:20).