



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

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Sunday, November 27, 2005
The First Sunday of Advent

*Advent Procession
at 11am*

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector

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CHRIST'S ADVENT – THE WORLD'S END

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

If you listen closely to the texts of today's Scriptures as well as to the beautiful anthems, hymns and responsories, you may hear a consistent theme in all of them. Advent, in all of its dimensions, has to do with the End of the World.

The Advent season is to be cherished as a spiritual preparation for the great feast of Christmas. In fact, today is the beginning of a new Christian liturgical year. But what the Church provides us in this preparation is a manifold reflection on how the Advent, the Coming, of Christ, in every way that He makes his advent, means the end of the world as we have known it and as the world assumes itself to be. Let us review the Advents of Christ.

Jesus' coming, from the very start, aroused the hostility of the rulers and powers of this world. Hearing word of a newborn "king of the Jews" from the eastern Magi, Herod the Great slaughtered the Holy Innocents of Bethlehem in a vain attempt to kill Christ. Meanwhile the Holy Family fled and took refuge in Egypt until Herod's death.

Thirty years later, the prophet John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner and cousin, declared that the "axe is laid to the root of the trees" and invited his hearers to repent. "Repent," said Jesus as he succeeded John and began his own public ministry, "for the Kingdom of God is at hand"; in fact, this Kingdom is "within you" and "among you", he said. For three years he taught and demonstrated the life of this Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' message challenged both the world and the religious establishment, so influenced and corrupted by the world. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to cries of "Hosanna to the Son of David" was itself the advent which provoked his crucifixion. Jesus' death was a production staged by the Church and State working together (not just the Jews and the Romans; they were the particular incarnation of the Church and State in Jesus' day). Yet Jesus was not merely a victim; he was the priest who presided over all this. Before it began, he foresaw his Passion; it was not only inevitable; it was necessary. The Christ had to face all the opposition the world has to offer. And in the confrontation, finishing with Jesus' death on the cross, the world came to an end. Truly the world ended on Good Friday at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

The re-constituted Church, now the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, has been preaching the Gospel since then; that is, since the third day after Jesus' disciples found his tomb empty and began encountering him alive after his passion; since the Spirit of God filled those

disciples with power to go preach the Good News to a dying world that attempted to take them down with it in its death.

The end of Jesus' earthly life, though much more public, was not unlike the beginning of his life, which brings us to his mother, Mary. Though betrothed, she had not "known" a man. She was a virgin. She was also blessed in her future husband, Joseph. For one day the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive in her womb and bear the Son of God. When she asked how this could be and feared the consequences, the Angel told her not to fear: the power of God would overshadow her, for with God nothing shall be impossible. Not least of the resultant wonders were Joseph's own belief of the angelic message and his protection of the young mother and her child. The world, thinking its own thoughts, scorned this – "We were not born of fornication," the Pharisees hissed at Jesus. But Mary shows all Christians the way forward, into the Kingdom of God; "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to your word," she replied to the angel. Thus Christ was conceived; the Word was heard and made flesh and dwelt among us. The old world was ending; a new one was coming to birth.

We will conclude this service with the Scripture, the reading from Revelation, which inspired the great hymn we sang at the beginning, "Lo, he comes with clouds descending." Yes, the kingdoms of this world, passing away, will openly give way in the end to the Kingdom of God, of which Christ is the King. What began so silently with Mary, so controversially with John the Baptist and Jesus in their ministries, so violently in Jesus' passion and death, will be seen, in the end, powerful and glorious, in clear manifestation – to those who love Christ's appearing as well as to those who hate it. This is Christ's Final Advent. The old world, passing away, will yield to a new world, a new heaven and a new earth, with the City of God at its center and the Lamb of God as its ruler, a realm of infinite life and immortality beyond all our imagining.

Before I let you go, let me add that this great theater of Advent is not just a play that we watch for our entertainment. It is a drama in which you and I play a part, not just liturgically on Advent Sunday, but daily and personally; the drama of life, our life. By God's grace we can see and enter Christ's Kingdom. We can step into the new world. Taking this step involves believing Jesus, trusting him to be as good as word, to be the true teacher about God and therefore about life. Above all, entering Christ's Kingdom involves loving without fear. So let me finish by encouraging each of us not to be afraid; to let the old world come to its end in us; and to take the step of faith into the new world which has already come in Jesus and is getting closer every day to its fulfillment. Let us find grace to say, Thy Kingdom come, O Lord, on earth...in my heart, as it is in heaven. Let perfect love cast out fear. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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