

The Advents of Christ

Christ's Appearance

Selected Texts

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Christ's Appearance

Scripture

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent in 2020.

“Advent” (from the Latin *adventus*) means “coming,” and it refers to the season immediately before Christmas.¹

The “first advent” looks back to Christ’s first coming. The “second advent” looks forward to Christ’s second coming. We live between these two advents.

This year I am exploring the advents of Christ in a sermon series I am calling “The Advents of Christ.”

On the First Sunday of Advent, I examined “Christ’s Entrance.” His first advent was prophesied, and he came almost 2,000 years ago (Deuteronomy 18:18-19; Isaiah 7:14). His second advent is also prophesied, and he will come at some time in the future (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

On the Third Sunday of Advent, I examined “Christ’s Timing.” His first advent was at a time predicted (Daniel 9:25). His second advent will be at a time that is unknown (Matthew 24:36).

Today, I would like to explore “Christ’s Appearance.” When he came the first time, he came as a man (Philippians 2:5-8). And when he comes the second time, he will come as God (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

On Christmas Eve, I would like to look at “Christ’s Arrival.” His first advent was announced (Luke 2:10-14). When he comes the second time, he will come unannounced, as a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

And finally, on the Sunday after Christmas Day, I would like to examine “Christ’s Purpose.” Christ’s first advent was to save the lost (Luke 19:10). His second advent, however, will be to judge

¹ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20–21.

the lost (Matthew 25:31-33, 41-46).

As we consider the advents of Christ, today we are going to examine the appearance of Christ's advent. Christ is fully God and fully man. When he appeared at his first advent, his human nature was dominant, if I could put it this way. And when he will appear at his second advent, his divine nature will be dominant.

Let us read Matthew 1:18-25:

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

**²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive
and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"**

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)

Introduction

Mary Daniel hadn't seen her husband for 114 days due to coronavirus restrictions at the senior care facility where he lives. Her husband, Steve, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's seven years ago and moved into a care facility in Jacksonville, Florida.

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She said she had been visiting her husband every night and would get him ready for bed. But when the coronavirus pandemic hit, health facilities restricted visitors as a way to prevent the spread of Covid-19 to vulnerable patients. The facility closed to visitors on March 11—the last time she saw Steve as a visitor.

Mary was worried about her husband spending so much time alone and said she was “desperate” to find another way to stay connected. She said, “We have separated these folks to save them, but...the isolation will absolutely kill them. Especially dementia patients, they need interaction. They need to be touched...so that they can grow instead of just really wither away.”

Mary said, “Out of the blue, two weeks ago, the corporate office of his memory care center called me and said, ‘We’ve got a part-time job available; would you like to take it?’ ” She was willing to do any job they offered for the chance to get inside, and what they ended up giving her was a dishwashing position.

The job is allowing Mary to see her husband regularly, and she’s grateful for it. “It is worth it to be able to visit him, and I can already just tell the difference in his demeanor after three visits. I get to go again tonight...it has made the world of difference for me.” She said her husband now feels love—something he missed out on when they were separated. “I’m so grateful...I am so lucky and fortunate. I want to be with him every day.”²

Because of the Fall, all of Adam’s descendants struggle with the effects of sin. The worst effect is that we are separated from God. Yet God loves his fallen, sinful creatures. In order to show his love for us, Jesus entered our pandemic-ridden, sinful world as a servant. He willingly did this to show us his love and to reconcile us to his heavenly Father. Jesus did this at his first advent.

Today, I would like to focus our attention on the appearance regarding Christ’s first and second advents.

² See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2020/november/woman-becomes-dishwasher-at-senior-care-facility-to-see-her.html>.

Lesson

In today's lesson, we learn about Christ's appearance for his first and second advents.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Christ's Appearance for His First Advent
2. Christ's Appearance for His Second Advent

I. Christ's Appearance for His First Advent

First, let's look at Christ's appearance for his first advent.

Since 1939, Stan Lee created or co-created some of the world's most popular superheroes. His super-human imagination gave birth to Black Panther, Spider-Man, the X-Men, Thor, Iron Man, the Fantastic Four, the Incredible Hulk, Daredevil, and Ant-Man, just to name a few.

Of course, the world has no shortage of storytellers, but Lee was something of a leader in the field. The Avengers series alone has generated more than \$10 billion in ticket sales at the box office since 2008. So, what set his stories apart from the rest? Lee was able to tap into deeply-rooted human instincts. He explains his secret in a 1984 interview with *Entertainment Tonight*:

The whole formula...was to say: Let's assume that somebody really could walk on walls like Spider-Man, or turn green and become a monster like The Hulk. That's a given; we'll accept that. But, accepting that, what would that person be like in the real world if he really existed? Wouldn't he still have to worry about making a living? Or having acne and dandruff? Or his girlfriend jilting him? What are the real problems people would have? I think that's what made the books popular.

One reason these movies and comic books have been so

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popular is that we want a superhero to rescue us from our enemies and our calamities. But we also want this superhero to be someone with whom we can identify. There are two instincts woven into our fallen nature: the knowledge that we need someone to save us and the deep desire for that person to understand our struggles.³

No-one understands that better than God. He created us, and knows all about our daily struggle with sin. Because of his great love for us, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to be our superhero. Jesus understands our struggles and he alone is able to save us from sin, Satan, and eternal hell.

The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Philippian Church. At one point in his letter, he urged them to follow Christ's example of humble service. This is how he put it in Philippians 2:5-8:

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Prior to his first advent, Christ was in the **“form of God.”** The Greek word translated as **“form”** (*morphe*) refers to the essence or underlying reality and not merely to appearance. The phrase **“form of God”** is roughly equivalent to the phrase **“equality with God.”** Christ did not have to grasp at **“equality with God”** because he is and has always been God.

The phrase **“form of God”** is contrasted with **“form of a servant”** in verse 7. Jesus took on a human nature by **“being born in the likeness of men.”** And he did that to pay the penalty for our sin **“by becoming obedient to the point of death, even**

³ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2020/february/we-want-our-superheroes-to-identify-with-us.html>.

death on a cross.” Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, became a man so that he might identify with us and save us.

Father Damien was a priest who became famous for his willingness to serve lepers. He moved to Kalawao—a village on the island of Molokai, in Hawaii, that had been quarantined to serve as a leper colony. For 16 years, he lived in their midst. He learned to speak their language. He bandaged their wounds, embraced the bodies no one else would touch, preached to hearts that would otherwise have been left alone. He organized schools, bands, and choirs. He built homes so that the lepers could have shelter. He built 2,000 coffins by hand so that, when they died, they could be buried with dignity. Slowly, it was said, Kalawao became a place to live rather than a place to die, for Father Damien offered hope.

Father Damien was not careful about keeping his distance. He did nothing to separate himself from his people. He dipped his fingers in the *poi* bowl along with the patients. He shared his pipe. He did not always wash his hands after bandaging open sores. He got close. For this, the people loved him.

Then one day he stood up and began his sermon with two words: “We lepers....”

Now he wasn't just helping them. Now he was one of them. From this day forward, he wasn't just on their island; he was in their skin. First he had chosen to live as they lived; now he would die as they died. Now they were in it together.

One day God came to Earth and began his message: “We lepers....” Now he wasn't just helping us. Now he was one of us. Now he was in our skin. Now we were in it together.⁴

During his first advent, Christ took on human form. He came to identify with us. He came as a servant to seek and to save the lost. He died to save sinners like you and me.

⁴ John Ortberg, *God Is Closer Than You Think* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 103-104.

II. Christ's Appearance for His Second Advent

Second, let's look at Christ's appearance for his second advent.

Jesus died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sin. Then he was buried in a borrowed tomb. However, three days after his death and burial, he was raised back to life again. Over the next forty days, Jesus repeatedly showed himself to his disciples and taught them about the kingdom of God (*cf.* Acts 1:3).

On the fortieth day, when the disciples had come together with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The disciples were still expecting the political nation of Israel to become God's kingdom on earth.

But Jesus said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Here is yet another statement of what we call the "Great Commission." The mission Jesus gave to his disciples and, therefore, to his church was to make disciples of people from all nations.

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And, just like that, Jesus was gone. His first advent had come to an end.

And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:6-11).

About twenty years after Jesus' ascension to his Father's right hand in heaven, Paul wrote to the Christian believers in Thessalonica. There was some confusion about when Jesus would return.

Moreover, there was also confusion about Christians who had already died. So, Paul wrote to clarify what happens to those who die as Christians and also about the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18:

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Apparently, some Christians in Thessalonica thought that believers who died before the second advent of Christ would remain in their graves. Paul assured them that the **“dead in Christ** [that is, deceased Christian believers] **will rise first”** at the second advent of Christ. **“Then,”** says Paul, **“we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord”** (4:17). So, at the second advent of Christ, the dead Christians will rise first and then the remaining, living Christians will join them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. What a glorious hope that is for all Christians!

The point I want to stress is that when Christ returns at his second advent, he will not return as a baby. He will return as the glorified God-Man. He will come in all his glory as the Victorious King who will gather all his elect together to present them to his

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Heavenly Father.

Theologian Dale Bruner writes:

David Peterson, former pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in Spokane, Washington, told about a time when he was preparing his sermon. His little daughter came in and said, “Daddy, can we play?”

He answered, “I’m awfully sorry, Sweetheart, but I’m right in the middle of preparing this sermon. In about an hour I can play.”

She said, “Okay, when you’re finished, Daddy, I am going to give you a great big hug.”

He said, “Thank you very much.” She went to the door and (these are his words) “Then she did a U-turn and came back and gave me a chiropractic, bone-breaking hug.”

David said to her, “Darling, you said you were *going* to give me a hug *after* I finished.”

She answered, “Daddy, I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to!”⁵

One way to look at Christ’s advents is that God wants us to know, through the first advent of Christ, how much we have to look forward to in the second advent of Christ.

Conclusion

Therefore, having examined Christ’s appearance for his first and second advents, let us be prepared for Christ’s appearance at his second advent.

One reason for examining the advents of Christ is for us to be prepared for the second advent of Christ. God could not have told us more clearly in the Bible that Christ is going to come to earth a second time. And we need to be prepared for the second advent of Christ.

⁵ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2000/december/12750.html>.

Jill Jonnes wrote about a fabulously wealthy American newspaper publisher named James Gordon Bennett. In 1835 Bennett started a famous newspaper called *The New York Herald*. He had two lavish apartments in Paris, plus a French country estate and a yacht harbored in Europe. He also had three homes in the U.S. even though he hadn't lived in the country for over ten years. But the servants in each of his homes always needed to be prepared for Bennett's unexpected arrival. Jonnes wrote: "Each [house] was fully staffed, ready to serve Bennett should he stride in the front door unannounced—the wine cellars were kept stocked, fires roared in the grates, and sheets were turned down nightly."⁶

Friends, in just the same way, we need to be ready for the imminent second advent of Christ.

"But," you may ask, "how can I be ready for the second advent of Christ?"

If you are not a Christian, you can be ready for the second advent of Christ by becoming a Christian. When Christ returns, all history is over. There is no second opportunity to become a Christian. So, turn to Christ in repentance and faith *today*.

And if you are a Christian, you can be ready for the second advent of Christ by living as a Christian. That means that you live as becomes a follower of Christ. You repent daily of sin. And you keep looking to Christ daily for your eternal salvation. Amen.

⁶ Jill Jonnes, *Eiffel's Tower* (New York, NY: Viking, 2009), 199.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org