

AND THE POWERS WILL BE SHAKEN, NOT ONCE, BUT TWICE!

First Sunday of Advent

December 1, 2024

And the powers of this earth will be shaken, not once, but twice!

Today we begin the season of Advent – four short weeks that lead us to Christmas. It is during this time that our thoughts are naturally drawn to that teenager daughter of Israel, Mary, who was soon to give birth to a child. The child's name had strangely already been proclaimed to Joseph in a dream by an angel. He would be called Yeshua, Jesus, and would be the Messiah, the Christ, the savior not only of Israel, but of all humanity and all creation. As a girl of very little means, life would have been very difficult for her. And yet, the impossible calling she was given, of raising the Christ child, made her task infinitely more challenging.

Advent is a time of anticipation and expectation. Each week carries a theme mentioned on the banners in our Narthex: hope, peace, joy, and love; themes of celebration and promise. And yet these themes seem to be strangely juxtaposed alongside today's Gospel reading where we hear words of foreboding; verses that speak of strange signs in the sun, moon, and stars. Listen to this warning: "here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth, for the powers in the heavens will be shaken." How is humanity to find hope and peace and joy and love in the midst of raging seas and terrors coming upon the earth?

I believe these two opposing themes can be reconciled in the image of Mary carrying the baby Jesus in her womb. This child, this Christ child, was the

one who was preordained before time to tear down and build up; to bring great hope, but also a threat to the powers of the earth.

When Jesus was still a baby, he was brought by his parents to be presented in the Temple. It was there, that a devout and holy man named Simeon waited. He had been told that he would see the promised hope of the nations before he died. He would see the messiah, the savior. His hopes were finally, and gloriously fulfilled one day as he saw Joseph and Mary and the child entering the Temple complex.

As they approached him, Simeon took a few wondrous minutes to stare longingly into the face of Jesus. And then he spoke: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed." In these words, this aged prophet was telling everyone within earshot, and all humanity down through the centuries to come, that this Jesus the Christ would tear many things down and build many things up. The child's mission would be to bring both consolation and also desolation, hope and despair, joy and sadness. It was no wonder that Herod, the Jewish king saw the threat in this child, and did everything in his power to make sure this infant threat would never see the light of another day.

The New Testament book of 1 Peter speaks as well of the upheaval Jesus would bring. It refers to him as the cornerstone of the building, a building that is representative of the Kingdom of God. The passage reads: "For it stands in scripture: 'See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever trusts in him will not be put to shame.' This honor, then, is for you who trust, but for those who do not trust, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,' and 'A

stone that makes them stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” Jesus was destined to be, for those who trust in him, the cornerstone of the building, of the kingdom of God. A chosen stone, a precious stone. But for those who would not put their trust in him, he would be a stone that would cause them to stumble and fall.

Today’s scripture hints at the first shaking of the earthly powers that Jesus will bring, but it speaks plainly of the second shaking still to come. And the powers of this earth will be shaken, not once, but twice!

Two thousand years ago Mary carried within her womb the very cornerstone of the kingdom of God. Jesus would be the full and complete, living, breathing, representation, of the glorious reality of God’s eternal reign. And as he grew physically, his normal human awareness, his human consciousness – the way he, and everyone back then saw reality – for Jesus, his mind developed and expanded to a higher level of conscious awareness, to where he eventually saw reality more as God sees reality. He saw clearly the reign of God. And he would implement the reign that he saw in his mind.

So, when Jesus was still growing in Mary’s womb, we could figuratively say that there was a timebomb developing within her; one that was destined to blow apart the societies of the world. The bomb was ticking when Jesus said things like this: “Go, and sell all your possessions and give to the poor.” “If someone sues for your shirt, give him your coat also.” “The one who worked the least will be paid the same amount as the person who worked all day.” “Love your enemies.”

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I do not believe that Mary had any idea what the full ramifications of this child of hers would be. And yet, she was not the only one who would carry the Christ within. As Christians, we too carry the Christ within us. Whether you realize it or not, each of us are pregnant with the Divine One.

The Sufi prophet and poet Jalaluddin Rumi spoke of this in a poem entitled: The body is like Mary. "The body is like Mary, and each of us has a Jesus inside. Who is not in labour, holy labour? Every creature is...God is really there within...needing to be born...breathing life into this world. The body is like Mary, and each of us, each of us has a Christ within." You see, each of us, like Mary, carry the Christ within. God longs to be born in order to breathe life into the world. But fair warning. This divine life will not always be well received. It may build up one kingdom while tearing down another.

The imagery of destruction is a warning of the shifting and shaking of the foundations of the world that are to come with the arrival of Christ. The world's systems, and the world's kingdom's will be thrown down at the coming of the kingdom of God.

The church father Tertullian writing in the second century put it this way: "The kingdom of God, beloved brethren, is beginning to be at hand; the reward of life, and the rejoicing of eternal salvation, and the perpetual gladness and possession lately lost of paradise, are now coming, with the passing away of the world; already heavenly things are taking the place of earthly, and great things of small, and eternal things of things that fade away."

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Jesus came in the flesh to shake the powers of the world. His disciples down through the centuries are called as well to usher in the reign of God, the reign of love, and thereby continue to shake the world's systems.

Today's Gospel speaks of the turmoil Jesus the Christ will bring. But then it ends with these words: "Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory." It speaks of a day still to come when the Son of Man will return again. And at that appearing, the powers of this world's systems will finally crumble fully to the ground. Injustice and inequality will be no more. God and humanity will be One, no separation between the two. Humanity will also be One with all humanity, no separation between them.

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