

Once He came in blessing,  
All our sins redressing;  
Came in likeness lowly,  
Son of God most holy;  
Bore the cross to save us;  
Hope and freedom gave us.

Still He comes within us;  
Still His voice would win us  
From the sins that hurt us;  
Would to truth convert us  
From our foolish error  
Ere He comes in terror.

Thus, if we have known Him,  
Not ashamed to own Him,  
Nor have spurned Him coldly  
But will trust Him boldly,  
He will then receive us,  
Heal us, and forgive us.

Those who then are loyal  
Find a welcome royal.  
Come, then, O Lord Jesus,  
From our sins release us;  
Let us here confess You  
Till in heav'n we bless You.

Leader: Sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done  
marvelous things!

## Introduction

People love to have things to look forward to. Birthdays, vacations, and Christmas are times that we can look forward to. Unfortunately, the actual celebration of our birthdays, the experiences we have on our vacations, and the way things go at Christmas often disappoint us. Years ago Peggy Lee sang a depressing song about the futility of life. The futility was summed up with these words, "Is that all there is? Is that all there is? If that's all there is my friend then let's keep dancing,

Let's break out the booze and have a ball, if that's all there is."

Our lessons for this Sunday remind us that when the events of this life disappoint us, and when the events of this life delight us, we still have more to look forward to—eternal life in heaven. Because no one knows when the Lord may come back to claim us, we can believe that every day may be that day. This gives every day a chance to be a day full of promise. Each day then has purpose. It leads us one day closer to the perfection we will experience as we live each day with Christ in heaven. In order to praise Jesus, who will come to take us to eternal joy, we can live our lives on earth filled with acts of love and selflessness that invite the whole world to see the coming Jesus in us.

1. What evidence is there in this world that many people don't believe in Judgment Day, a day that will require each person to give a personal accounting of his or her life?

2. Mark reminds us in the Gospel lesson, "Be on guard! Be alert!" for the end is coming. What evidence can you provide that at times even Christians are not on guard or alert?

3. Jesus said, "You do not know when that time will come." Because we do not know the time of His return, Jesus warns, "Be on guard! Be alert!" What does Jesus mean by these words?

## Inform

Consider the following summaries of the lessons assigned for the First Sunday of Advent.

Leviticus 23:16b-17, 64:1-8—Isaiah addresses the people of Israel and shares with them the Lord's disappointment with their unfaith-

fitness. They haven't looked like or behaved like the chosen people of God. The people of Israel can't change on their own, but God can and will bring change to Israel and the whole world. Isaiah acknowledges God as the potter and the people of Israel as the clay. Only the potter can transform the clay. A day is coming when all the world will see His glory and turn to Him.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9—St. Paul continues with the theme of the Second Coming. Given the imminent return of Christ, Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians that as they await eagerly Jesus' return that He will keep them strong in the faith until the end. Paul emphasizes God's work in keeping them steadfast in the faith until the day when they through faith will be judged blameless. Our lives centered in Christ allow others to see Him in us and believe in Him as their Savior so that they can also welcome Him with joy when He comes at the end of time.

Mark 13:33-37—Jesus Himself speaks about His return to earth. He reminds His disciples to "Be on guard! Be alert!" Using a metaphor of a man leaving his house and putting his servants in charge, He tells His disciples to "Keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back." In these words Jesus prepares His disciples for both the time when He will leave them and the time when He will return.

1. What words and/or phrases does Isaiah use to describe the Israelites' relationship to God? God's relationship to the Israelites?
2. What hope does Isaiah still hold in spite of the Israelites' rebellion against God? See Isaiah 64:8.
3. Jesus' words to His disciples, "Be on guard! Be alert!" echo God's continual reminders throughout the Old Testament to the people of Israel. How did the people of Israel respond to God's warnings and pleas? Refer to the Old Testament reading for insight. How do you think the disciples would respond if left to their own devices?

4. Paul says with confidence, "He [Jesus] will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus." How can Paul speak with such confidence? See 1 Corinthians 1:4-6. What confidence do these words give you as you anticipate Judgment Day?

---

---

## Connect

---

---

1. How do the words of Isaiah 64:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 provide you with confidence, as you respond to Jesus' words, "Be on guard! Be alert!"?
2. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace—God's Word and Sacraments—to strengthen our saving faith in Jesus. How might seizing opportunities to hear God's Word and celebrate the Lord's Supper better equip us to "Be on guard! Be alert!"? What danger do people risk if they neglect or ignore the means of grace that God has provided? In what activities might you and your family become involved so that God can enable you to be "strong to the end"?
3. People often spend inordinate amounts of time trying to determine the exact time of Jesus' return. Based upon the lessons for today, answer the following questions. Why is trying to determine the time of Jesus' return a futile activity? How might Christians better spend their time to prepare for Christ's return?

---

---

## Vision

---

---

### During This Week

1. Make a list of all the things you would do today if you knew that the Lord was coming back tomorrow.
2. Make a list of goals that you would like to meet between now and Christ's coming. Then ask yourself, "What must I do today in order to make sure I meet these goals?" Then, go begin doing those things.
3. Name someone you know who doesn't believe in Jesus. Pray daily for that person's salvation.

### Closing Worship

Pray or sing together "I'm But a Stranger Here" (LW 515).

I'm but a stranger here, Heav'n is my home;  
Earth is a desert drear, Heav'n is my home.  
Danger and sorrow stand Round me on ev'ry hand;  
Heav'n is my fatherland, Heav'n is my home.

What though the tempest rage, Heav'n is my home;  
Short is my pilgrimage, Heav'n is my home;  
And time's wild wintry blast Soon shall be overpast;  
I shall reach home at last, Heav'n is my home.

Therefore I murmur not, Heav'n is my home;  
Whate'er my earthly lot, Heav'n is my home;  
And I shall surely stand There at my Lord's right hand.  
Heav'n is my fatherland, Heav'n is my home.

### Scripture Lessons for Next Sunday

In preparation for the Second Sunday in Advent read Isaiah 40:1-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8.