

Many songs convey the advent, ministry, exaltation, and return of Jesus. In 1866, Benjamin Russell Hanby wrote,

*Who is He born in the stall, at whose feet the shepherds fall? Who is He in deep distress, fasting in the wilderness?
'Tis the Lord! O wondrous story! 'Tis the Lord! the King of glory! At His feet we humbly fall. Crown Him! Crown Him, Lord of all!
Who is He the people bless for His words of gentleness? Who is He to whom they bring all the sick and sorrowing?
Who is He that stands and weeps at the grave where Lazarus sleeps? Who is He the gathering throng greet with loud triumphant song?
Lo! at midnight, who is He prays in dark Gethsemane? Who is He on yonder tree dies in grief and agony?
Who is He that from the grave comes to heal and help and save? Who is He that from His throne rules through all the world alone?*

Proposition

Jesus' birth gives way to His death...but there is more! In ***Awake, My Heart***, J. S. Baxter writes, “*We must read the story of Bethlehem in the light of Easter morning. Jesus rose; and His resurrection is the divine pre-attestation that He shall yet rule the world as King and Judge.*” In turn, we must read the story of Easter and the Ascension in light of Christ's return! As Paul shared his thanks for his fellow believers in Colossae, he assured them of “*the hope reserved for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel*” (1:5).

Our series, “***The Mystery of the Manger***”, concludes with the sixth truth-for-life implication of Jesus' birth. Mystery (μυστήριον) is found notably in I Timothy 3:16 which expresses how great (μεγα) is the “*mystery of godliness*”. This is the truth that the fallen become children of God by faith in the finished, redemptive work of Jesus.

Before Christmas Eve we considered Jesus' eternity, incarnation, atonement, and ascension. At our Carols & Candlelight service we focused on Jesus' presence in this world as “Emmanuel” (God with us). Today we come to our final fact about Christ. Let's think about His **return** or **second advent**. Our text is **I John 3:1-3**.

In His chat with Nicodemus, Jesus explained that He alone “ascends” (ἀναβιβηκεν) to heaven (John 3:13). In Acts 1:9 the term is “taken/lifted up” (ἐπὶ ἡρθη). Angels assured the astonished disciples, “*This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.*” (Acts 1:11b)

There is also a powerful link between our incorporation into God's family as sons and daughters (Galatians 4:4-7) and the return of Jesus for us: “*waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved.*” (Romans 8:23-24) In our text there are **three ongoing activities** in the life of the believer, because Jesus will return.

[1] Walking in God's grace – v. 1

This fall, our Fellowship National family reaffirmed and updated our Affirmation of Faith. Of Jesus it articulates this:

We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the **promised Saviour of the world**, eternally begotten of the Father, fully God and fully human; we believe in his virgin birth, sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, triumphant ascension, mediatorial ministry, and **personal return**.

What does our text say about these two realities? And how does it relate to the second coming of Jesus? We are urged to have a sense of **awe and astonishment** at the grace of God for us. “*See you*” (lit.) or “*behold*” is a command to engage with the gift of God's grace. Followers of Jesus are “born of God” (2:29). We are reminded that this relationship is not merely nominal, or in name only. Believers are indeed “*called*” the **children of God**. But John adds the comment “*and we are*” because this is the actual state of the people of God.

We are informed that oneness with Jesus creates a **distinction** between believer and unbeliever. This is not to justify hatred or entitlement on the part of Christians. But it is an important recognition that guides conduct. What should fuel our anticipation of Christ's return? By God's grace, believers are in sync with Him, not the world.

[2] Waiting for Christ's appearing – v. 2

This passage contains no signs of the age such as we read in Matthew 24. This text has no apocalyptic descriptions as in Revelation. What we do learn is that there will be an amazing completion to our salvation. Christians “*will be like Him*” and “*will see Him just as He is.*” Do you find the days between Christmas and New Years confusing?

In a more profound way, the time between salvation and eternity can feel confusing too. Consider that...

- Believers are in **process** – we “*are being transformed into his likeness with every increasing glory.*” (II Corinthians 3:18) And yet, on the other hand...
- Believers are awaiting **perfection** – Jesus promised, “*My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*” (John 14:2-3)

What we call “Jesus’ second coming” is the **Parousia** (meaning “presence” or even “royal visit”). This term is used as general theological term for the various aspects of the end times. Later, in the spring, we are going to look at some more detail of the end times in a series, “**Pondering the Parousia**”. The return of Jesus is not just about satisfying our curiosity. But it is about us grasping the hope and significance of His glorious, eternal reign.

The Christian lives life on tiptoe, searching the skies. We awaken with the thought: perhaps today! Our hope is centered on the bodily return of Christ; it’s all about him. All of history is headed to the great day that will inaugurate an endless era of justice, joy, and glory. (“Hope At The End Of The Age” **Servant**, Max Lucado, Spring 2025, 10)

Even communion points to Christ’s return: “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.*” (I Corinthians 11:26) There is a great contrast between the first and second Advent of Jesus. In his book **God with Us: The Miracle of Christmas** (Zondervan, 1989, 135) John MacArthur writes,

The first time Jesus came...

He came veiled in the form of a child
A star marked his arrival
Wise men brought Him gifts
There was no room for Him
Only a few attended His arrival
He came as a baby

The next time Jesus comes...

He will be recognized by all
Heaven will be lit by His glory
He will bring rewards for His own
The world won’t be able to contain His glory
Every eye shall see Him
He will come as Sovereign King and Lord of all

[3] Wanting the Spirit’s cleansing – v. 3

If we have the hope of Christ’s return, then we must cleanse and “purify” (αγνιζειν) ourselves. This term originally meant “*to make ceremonially ready*” (**LKGNT**, Fritz Rienecker, Zondervan, 1980, 790). Recently, we have been asking one another, “are you ready for Christmas?” However, as followers of Jesus the more appropriate question is, “are you ready for heaven?” This is not just about **salvation** – being rescued from sin. It is equally about **sanctification** – being regenerated by the Spirit. This was John’s argument through to verse 24 (see Titus 3:5).

CONCLUSION – See Digging Deeper

As we conclude our Advent series, we are still awaiting the second coming of Jesus. “*We live between the Advents*” states Max Lucado in, [What Does Christmas Have to Do with End Times?](#) Do you see the mystery in all of this? Once a road manager for the band ACDC, Barry Taylor became a theologian and wrote, “*God is the name of the blanket we throw over mystery to give it shape.*” However, God is not some impersonal, spiritual concept! He seeks true relationship with us through the life and work of Jesus. John Wilbur Chapman wrote these lyrics in 1910,

*One day when heaven was filled with His praises, One day when sin was as black as could be,
Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin, Dwelt among men, my example is He!
One day they led Him up Calvary’s mountain, One day they nailed Him to die on the tree;
Suffering anguish, despised and rejected, Bearing our sins, my Redeemer is He!
One day they left Him alone in the garden, One day He rested, from suffering free;
Angels came down o’er His tomb to keep vigil; Hope of the hopeless, my Savior is He!
One day the grave could conceal Him no longer, one day the stone rolled away from the door;
Then He arose, over death He had conquered, Now is ascended, my Lord ever more!
One day the trumpet will sound for His coming, one day the skies with His glory will shine;
Wonderful day, my beloved ones bringing; glorious Savior, this Jesus is mine!
[Refrain] Living, He loved me; dying, He saved me; Buried, He carried my sins far away;
Rising, He justified freely, forever; One day He’s coming: O glorious day!*

Communion

☐ **Welcome**

☐ **Warning**

☐ **Bread**

☐ **Cup**

Responsive Reading

LEADER

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners! Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great!

CONGREGATION

Jesus appeared in the flesh, 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.

LEADER

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

CONGREGATION

Keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time.

LEADER

God is the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.

CONGREGATION

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.