

# Advent: A Time to Wake From Our Hypnotic Sleep

## Biblical Reflection for 1st Sunday of Advent, Year A

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, NOV. 23, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Advent season in its liturgical observance is devoted to the coming of God at the end of history when Jesus shall reign as king.

The time is chiefly a celebration of "the coming of God" in ultimate triumph. Our three Scripture readings for the first Sunday of Advent (Year A) challenge us to adopt a timetable in which the seemingly distant parousia (final coming) impinges on the present moment.

An unexpected vision of salvation

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah (2:1-5) sends chills up and down our spines today. The prophet describes a beautiful and rather unexpected vision of universal salvation, justice and peace, not only for Jerusalem and the Holy Land, but for all of humanity: "In days to come, the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths. For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (vv 2-3).

In the messianic kingdom the prophets generally see the Lord's house as the seat of authority and the source of clear and certain doctrine; also, its rule willingly accepted by all peoples, maintained by spiritual sanctions, and tending to universal peace. This passage is found substantially unchanged in Micah 4:1-3; it probably, although not certainly, has Isaiah as its author.

The Isaiah reading is very fitting to begin the Advent season, for we are truly on pilgrimage during the next few weeks -- making our long and tedious journey up to the Lord, in order that we may pay him homage and recognize in the Child of Bethlehem just to what degree God would go to show us his love.

Our hypnotic condition

In the second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Romans (13:11-14), the Apostle to the Gentiles says that Christians claim to be people of the new day that will dawn with the return of Christ. In verses 11-12, Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome that this is the hour to awake from their sleep ... for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness (and) put on the armor of light.

The Greek word for sleep is "hypnos," (11) and while we cannot attribute the full notion of being "hypnotized" to Paul himself in this text, it is nonetheless true that we can become so accustomed to the normalcy of evil that we live under its spell, as if hypnotized by a power outside ourselves that we cannot

## ZENIT

discern or dislodge ourselves. It is good for us during Advent to ask: "What are the hypnotic conditions that we experience without our consciousness of them?" The sins of the "flesh" (v. 14) are not only sexual sins, but anything that opposes the life-giving work of the Spirit begun in Christ. Instead of planning for nighttime behavior they should be concentrating on conduct that is consonant with avowed interest in the Lord's return.

### Days of Noah

In today's Gospel reading from Matthew (24:37-44), Noah's contemporaries were unprepared for the flood. They ate and drank and married. They didn't dream of an event that would mark the end of time as they knew it. The people of Noah's time were so caught up in everyday affairs that they failed to take precautions against the flood. Three parables are told to remind us of the necessity of vigilance -- because the Second Coming has no "estimated time of arrival."

In the verses: "Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left" (40-41), the former probably means taken into the kingdom; the latter, left for destruction. People in the same situation will be dealt with in opposite ways. In this context, the discrimination between them will be based on their readiness for the coming of the Son of Man. The theme of vigilance and readiness is continued with the bold comparison of the Son of Man to a thief who comes to break into a house (42-44).

### Centrality of time

Time is central to the Christian celebration of Advent. This season reminds us that the mystery of faith is not complete until Jesus' Second Coming. We are living in this in-between time of Resurrection-Ascension Pentecost and the time of the Parousia. How do we deal with the issue of time? Christ has given us warning of such an event coming. We can't say, "We had no idea," as the people said up to the day that Noah went into the ark and closed the door.

We need to be ready and we need to be awake. Just like a security alarm wakes up a homeowner, Advent wakes up Christians who are in danger of sleeping through their lives. If we are no longer asking the hard questions and if we are no longer getting our answers from God through his Scriptures, then it is time to wake up! Advent asks us to be aware of responsibilities and see to their fulfillment! Advent challenges us to attend to relationships, reach out to the needy, cherish the gift of human life, and make time for prayer! The Second Coming thus becomes an event that gives purpose and energy to our every breath and pulse here and now.

### Coming of Christ

Advent does not change God. Advent deepens our longing and anticipation that God will do what prophets and the anointed have promised. We pray that God will yield to our greedy need to see and feel the promise of salvation here and now. As Christians, we proclaim the coming of Christ -- not just a first coming but another as well that will be far more glorious than the first. The first took place under the sign of patient suffering; the second, on the contrary, will see Christ wearing the crown of God's kingdom. In the meantime, however, there is the painful necessity of the cross for Jesus and all believers in him.

### The pregnant season

On Saturday evening, Nov. 27, eve of Advent this year, Benedict XVI will celebrate in St. Peter's Basilica a "Vigil for All Nascent Human Life" coinciding with first vespers of the First Sunday of Advent. The Holy Father has said: "The period in which we prepare for Christmas is an appropriate time to invoke divine protection on every human being called into existence, and to thank God for the gift of life we received from our parents."

## ZENIT

"Nascent" is a word not frequently used in our daily vocabulary. While it clearly refers to unborn human life, its other meanings include "promising," "growing," and "hopeful." As we enter into Advent, our thoughts naturally focus on the hope and expectation of the coming of Christ. Christ came to us first as an unborn child, tiny, vulnerable and in need of protection and care of his mother.

By calling for this worldwide prayer vigil, Benedict XVI invites us to focus both on the hope and promise of new life in Christ that we celebrate at Christmas but also to acknowledge the sad fact that worldwide there are an estimated 50 million abortions performed each year. Lives are simply thrown away. Many people in our time have truly become "hypnotized" to this reality. We have justified our reasons and means for destroying life in the womb because it disturbs and upsets us, forcing us to change our way of living. What are the hypnotic conditions against human life that we experience without our consciousness of them?

More than any other time of year, Advent is a pregnant season. We need a renewal of faith and hope about the meaning of life as the reflection of God. The timing of this prayer service for "nascent life" at the beginning of the Advent season is a happy coincidence that reminds us of the great gift from God that each and every human life represents.

### Taking stock

As we begin this holy season of longing and waiting for the Messiah, let us take stock of human life and not become like the people of Noah's time who were so caught up in everyday affairs that they failed to take precautions against the flood. Advent reminds us that it is no longer business as usual. Something new is about to happen.

Let us pray during these days of Advent: May God, the Father of Life have mercy on all who have sinned against life. May the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus, who knit us in our mother's womb, preserve all infants from physical harm from the moment of conception.

May Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary, who ennobled all human life when he became flesh in the womb of the Daughter of Zion, enlighten our minds to see the dignity of every human life from its earliest moments.

May Jesus of Nazareth who loved the afflicted, the sick, the broken and those who mourn, strengthen parents of unborn children with disabilities to cherish the infant entrusted to their care.

May the Lord who forgives sinners each day, draw all who have acted against innocent human life to repentance and forgiveness, and heal them through an outpouring of grace.

May the God of Israel increase our longing for Christ our Savior and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the light of his truth.

### Looking forward to the second coming

Let us not forget the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem this season: "At his first coming, he was wrapped in linens and laid in a manger; at the second, light shall be his robe. In the first coming he endured the Cross, heedless of its shame; in his second coming he will be in glory surrounded by an army of angels. Let us therefore not stop at his first coming but look forward to the second.

"We hailed him at his first coming with the words, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' and shall hail him in the same way at his second coming. For we shall go out to meet the Lord and his angels, and, prostrating ourselves before him, we shall cry, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

## ZENIT

[The readings for the First Sunday of Advent are Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44]

\* \* \*

Basilian Father Thomas Rosica, chief executive officer of the Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation and Television Network in Canada, is a consultant to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. He can be reached at: [rosica@saltandlighttv.org](mailto:rosica@saltandlighttv.org).

--- --- ---

On the Net:

Salt and Light: [www.saltandlighttv.org](http://www.saltandlighttv.org)

Video advent reflections: <http://saltandlighttv.org/advent>

| [More](#)

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the [editor](#).