

Raise Your Heads

"Jesus said, There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Wow! Now that Scripture above sounds the stuff of Christian nightmare.

On the first Sunday Advent aren't we supposed to hear happy stories about how Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus are going to bring us the joy of Christmas?

Here we are, once again at the beginning of that holy time, when our waiting for the coming child is meant to be wed to the expectation that God can and does make all things new again. I marvel to think of how the season of Advent has arrived just in time for us this year. Mass shootings are on the rise, the country is divided, unnecessary famine is once again an ever-present reality.

I would love to find the magic words that could help refocus our energies into receiving the wonderful news that God is about the business of delivering hope. Advent celebrates that God delivers hope into the heart of a sometimes seemingly hopeless reality.

The first coming of Christ saw a bright light breaking into human existence that revealed that the love of God for God's people is so strong and so deep that God was willing to go to any length to bring us joy and wholeness.

The first coming of this beautiful child illuminated a hope in the human heart that the world could be a place of justice and freedom and love for all people.

This hope has not left us. We should remember that our current divisions, entrenchments and fears have only the power that we give them.

But the love of God—God's promise to deliver God's people from their worst inclinations and hopelessness—possesses the power of the eternal. We can choose to take hold of this promise and follow God's coming child into radical love.

Listening to Jesus' words, as he sits with his disciples high on a hill overlooking the great Temple, you may well wonder if my words hold any truth. Even as they all gaze upon this magnificent structure that they understand as the center of their universe, Jesus tells them that soon not one stone would stand upon another and all of it would come crashing down.

But Jesus knows that not even his death, at the hands of those he came to free, will end God's love for God's people. He tells them to keep awake, to be alert to the truth that no manmade darkness can quench God's unassailable light.

Since Jesus' first coming, we have been a world caught between darkness and Light; this is the great tension in which the season of Advent finds us.

The Light of Christ calls us into the fullness of life with God. But we sometimes have trouble distinguishing the Christ light that leads us down into the waters of life from the bright lights that lure us away into an imitation of life.

The light that flickers from the 24-hour news cycle on our televisions is not the source of life. In the challenge of modern politics, they flash with dividing ideologies. The news just streams in the background of our lives like a soundtrack that keeps us on edge, drives us further into division. The constant stream of words and images that flow out into our minds have the power to shape us and our spiritual lives in ways we do not understand.

This holy season of Advent might be a time to take a break from filling our eyes and minds full of such shows, and instead create space, a sacred emptiness and longing in our hearts and minds that this coming child can fill.

Advent comes with an invitation to pause and breathe and examine our fears closely and test their power. So many of our fears render us powerless to love, they fill us and kill us little by little.

Advent asks us to wake from sleepwalking through life into wakefulness to a world resplendent with God's beauty, forgiveness, mercy and diversity.

Advent comes with the renewal of Christ's life within us. The compassion and mercy Jesus inaugurated in his first coming grows and expands to fill our lives as we follow where he led.

The revealing of God—the Apocalypse of God, is no horror story. Christian hope lies in the knowledge that when the sun is darkened and the moon will not give its light, it is only because a greater Light is shining.

Advent asks us to examine what we think we know about God and to challenge the voices of fear and destruction with the light and love, courage and hope of Jesus. Raise your heads, redemption is drawing near.

Wishing You a Blessed Advent,
Stephanie+