

Bible Challenge: November 23-29, 2015

INTRODUCTION

Advent is about the "coming days." God's people have always lived in great expectation, but that expectation finds specific, repeated enunciation in the texts appointed for these four weeks. The ancients anticipated a "righteous Branch to spring up for David." The Thessalonians awaited "the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints." Our Lord's contemporaries hoped for the time "to stand before the Son of Man." With them we eagerly await the coming days: another Christmas celebration, a second coming, and the advent of our Lord in word and supper.

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 33:14-16

In the Old Testament, "righteousness" often has to do with being faithful in relationship. God acts righteously both in punishing Israel for its sin and in having mercy. In today's reading, Jerusalem's future name—"The Lord is our righteousness"—proclaims that the Lord is even now working salvation for Israel.

Adventure Challenge: Jeremiah 33.

Explorer Challenge: After reading Jeremiah 33, research the events (about 587 BCE) that were the historical context for Jeremiah's prophesies.

PSALM: Psalm 25:1-10 *To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. (Ps. 25:1)*

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 25.

Explorer Challenge:

Option A. Psalm 25 is an "acrostic psalm." Research what that means and how common acrostics are among the Psalms.

Option B. Psalm 25 is an individual's prayer for help. What do we learn about this individual's problems and concerns? What reasons does the Psalm give for hope?

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Upon Timothy's report from the congregation at Thessalonica, Paul is exuberant with gratitude for them. In this passage from his letter, Paul voices overflowing thanks, joy, and blessings for the people of this growing church.

Adventure Challenge: 1 Thessalonians 2:17 – 3:13.

Explorer Challenge: Scholars believe 1 Thessalonians is "the oldest book in the New Testament." Do some research to learn a little more about the book's background and themes.

GOSPEL: Luke 21:25-36

God will fulfill God's purposes and, already, hidden signs of that fulfillment abound. On that great day there will be dismay, perplexity, confusion, and terror, but God's people shall be given strength to stand boldly and receive God's promised redemption.

Adventure Challenge: Luke 21. (Note similarities to Mark 13, which we read two weeks ago.)

Explorer Challenge: Compare statements in Luke 21 to those in Luke 11:29-32 and 17:22-37.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection, alert us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and redeem us for your life of justice, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Stand up and raise your heads — your redemption is drawing near. (*Luke 21:28*)