

**ADVENT 1C 2024**  
**Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church**  
**Wilmington, Delaware**  
**December 1, 2024**

Happy new year! To celebrate the occasion, as we do every year, we're observing our regularly scheduled apocalypse!

The First Sunday of Advent always focuses on the Christ who is to come—that phrase in our Creeds that says “he will come again to judge the living and the dead” or something similar. If you've wandered into any of the nebulous territory covered by the “Left Behind” series of books and movies, you'll recognize the term “rapture.” If you've seen the opening of a particular episode of the HBO series *Six Feet Under*, you'll remember a different interpretation on that idea. And, just for another source of “inspiration” you can read or watch *Good Omens*.

What do we mean when we say we expect Christ to return? And, related to that, since we're some 2,000 years after that event was first mentioned, do we really believe it will happen?

Much of what we teach about the second coming is found in one of our lessons today, and in another writing. Paul's first letter to the Church in Thessalonika has some words that I heard my own grandmother say as she lay on an emergency room bed. We were all waiting for the diagnosis that would ultimately name the disease that would lead to her death. She raised her hand from her side, pointed up and said, “we will meet him in the air.” That hope gave her strength to face what was to come, even as at the age of 95 she found herself in the hospital as a patient for the first time in her life.

The other source of teaching is, of course, the Revelation to John, which is sometimes called The Apocalypse. While it has some beautiful writing, it is also somewhat sensational and very nearly didn't get included in the canon of Christian scripture. Many still try to decode its language, assuming that there are many secret codes there besides the number “666.” Some will point out that was coded language for the Roman emperor, most of whom had characteristics that qualified them for the nickname “beast.”

There may be some here who think the apocalypse is much closer than it once seemed. Some of you may know someone who has stockpiled non-perishable food and protective items in a bunker so they're ready for it when it comes. And, as we've seen in recent history, there are yet others who seem to want to go ahead and bring it about, so long as it's on their own terms. The appearance of the risen Christ with an army of angels would most likely result in varied and sudden forms of precipitation among those folks.

In apocalyptic sections of the Gospels, Jesus tells us that these events will be a surprise to everyone, and even he doesn't know the day or time. He's not really

concerned about it, even as he faces the very real apocalyptic moment that occurred outside Jerusalem with his death and resurrection. Those two events caused the earth itself to tremble, according to at least one account.

Jesus isn't concerned with calendars and clocks. He teaches us to be aware of the reality around us, to be awake, or as some might say, "woke." Jesus has one short teaching to help us prepare for any event on a wide range of apocalypses: be faithful.

Since all four Gospels were written a few decades after the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, they all point us to a new reality that is the great apocalyptic moment of all time. The resurrection of Jesus is the great story that began the life of the Church; it was the story the apostle Paul kept telling that got him arrested and ultimately beheaded. Paul's story is about a God who accomplished much more than any Roman emperor could do. God transformed death itself into life that never ends. Think about that as we consider how God might transform life while it continues.

Jesus shows us how to make that happen, if on a much smaller scale, even as we remain faithful to the hope that we ourselves might, in Paul's words, "attain the resurrection from the dead." That faithfulness is found in the little things that come our way that are often life-changing. You know what some of them are, because you've experienced them yourselves. And that faithfulness is ours to proclaim at the last moments when we surrender those we love back to God: even at the grave, we make our song, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

The apocalypse isn't something to fear, even if the events that accompany it seem fearful. The apocalypse, when and however it happens, is that moment when the eternal steps back into human time, transforming us and the time into the awareness that the one who overcame our most apocalyptic moment—death—has been here before and is ready to lead us through and beyond it.

That's the faith that lets us proclaim, *maranatha*. Come, Lord Jesus.