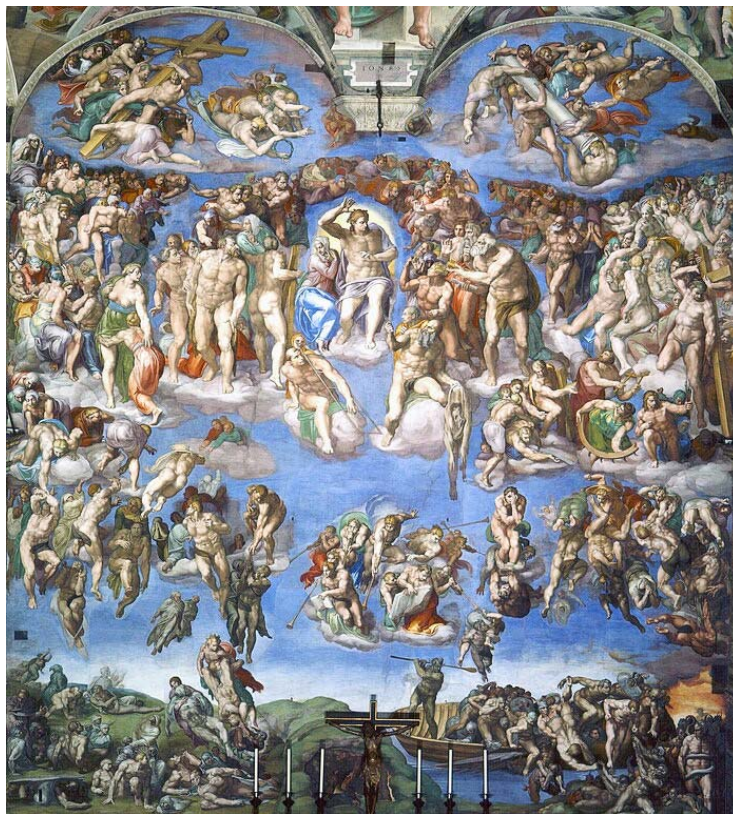


Study 1 – Anticipation



The Last Judgement Michelangelo c.1540

'May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.' (1 Thess 3:13)

a) The day is coming!

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Jeremiah's role of as prophet spans some four decades and the reign of five kings, from 626 BC until after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 BC. There's are familiar Old Testament themes within it, of unfaithfulness, battles lost and exile as a punishment for sins. But as well as God's anger come words of hope, because this is not the end of God's covenant relationship with this people.

There is a promise of restoration if their lives are turned around, a time of healing, peace and security, release from captivity, and a rebuilding of the nation of Israel, when Jerusalem's now deserted streets will once again be filled with the sound of joy and gladness (vs 10-11).

However, this is not going to happen in the immediate future. There will be partial fulfilment over succeeding generations, but ultimately, the days he talks of will only really be seen in the time of the Messiah, the righteous Branch sprouting from David's line, and be fulfilled in his ultimate reign.

b) Where is the Hope?

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

On the first Sunday in Advent, it is traditional for churches following the Lectionary readings to think beyond the familiar Nativity scene in Bethlehem with the proud parents Joseph and Mary, the baby Jesus, visiting shepherds and Magi, and consider Jesus' Second Coming, his return in glory.

Corresponding with his colleague Timothy in Thessalonica, Paul has received good news about the Christian community there, following concerns that some might be struggling faith-wise because of opposition in the area (Paul and Silas had a narrow escape whilst there and were forced to flee), but the word from Timothy is that all is well with the

Thessalonian believers, despite the many challenges they might face in living out their faith.

One of the reasons Paul wrote this letter was not just to offer encouragement in the present moment, but to look to the future and address what must have been a recurring question about what the Christian hope is for those who have died before Jesus returns? The answer, Paul says, is that believers should focus on following Jesus' teaching on how to live now, sharing faith and love, living blameless and holy lives.

Keep up the good work is his message, and the blessings will follow!

c) Watch and pray

Luke 21:25-36

Earlier, Jeremiah talked of the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 BC, and centuries later here is Jesus talking of the end times which includes a time of persecution, wars, desolation and more as punishment, 'in fulfilment of all that's been written' (vs 2022). Once again Jerusalem will be trampled on, its temple destroyed. There's a warning but also encouragement to persevere, stay focussed on living a life pleasing to God, and be watchful.

There has always been speculation and animated discussion about how Christians can best understand the concept of the second coming of Jesus Christ, and it is easy to get drawn into these when looking at the state of the world, past or present. In his commentary, William Barclay says, 'When it will be and what it will be like, are not ours to know. But the one great truth it enshrines is this—that history is going somewhere.'



The Destruction of Jerusalem, Google Art Project, anon 15thc

Some have seen history as circular, reaching a climax and then starting again, repeating itself. For Christians, history draws us toward a goal or target, when Jesus Christ will be Lord of all. But what is clear is that we also need to follow Jesus' words and 'be always on the watch', living lives of hope and expectation, ones that reflect the life and teaching of Jesus.

Traditions #1 The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath, or Advent crown, is a Christian tradition that symbolizes the passage of the four weeks of Advent in the liturgical calendar of the Western church. Originally a Lutheran practice, it has now spread to many other Christian denominations.



Advent Wreath, 1839, by Johann Hinrich Wichern

The wreath owes its origins to Lutheran pastor Johann Hinrich Wichern, a pioneer in urban mission work among the poor. During Advent children at a

mission school would keep asking him if Christmas had arrived yet so in 1839 he took a large wooden ring from an old cartwheel and decorated it with 24 small red candles and four large white ones. One small candle was lit successively every weekday and Saturday during Advent, and a large white candle was lit each Sunday. This custom eventually evolved into the smaller wreath of today with four or five candles.

The Advent wreath of today is full of symbolism. There are evergreen leaves representing the hope of eternal life, and four candles (often red) representing the weeks of Advent (as hope, peace, joy and love) and often a central white candle (the Christ candle) lit on Christmas Eve and throughout the Christmas season.

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They say...

'Advent spirituality is not a time to meditate on the actual birth of Christ. According to tradition, we ought not to sing Christmas carols until Christmas itself, for Advent is not a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus in the manger but a time to long for the coming of the Savior. The appropriate sense of this season is captured in the pleading of "O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel."' (Robert E. Webber)