

# “The Two Advents of Christ”

## *Various Texts*

As Americans, we do not really get royalty—the idea that a person is qualified to lead simply because he or she was born into the right family. We value self-determination. We want to see the most qualified person lead (at least in theory), even if they were born into the most humble circumstances. Thus, when we study Scripture and read about kings and princes, we may feel a bit of a disconnect.

Yet monarchy was the predominate system of government in the ancient world. And when the crown prince was born, it was a big deal. It meant there would be a successor to the throne. It was cause for celebration and rejoicing. We actually have some rare footage that was uncovered by archaeologists back in 1994.

Show a clip of Simba’s birth from *The Lion King* [1m].

That’s how newborn kings are welcomed: all the citizens of the kingdom gathered around in joyous celebration. Yet that’s not how Jesus was welcomed when he was born into the world. Even though he was the king of the Jews, he arrived with little fanfare.

This is not an expository message, but rather a Christmas meditation. We’re going to trace a theme through Scripture and ponder it for a while. We’re going to look at “The Two Advents of Christ.” We’re going to see that the First and Second Advents are quite different from one another. Yet they do share some things in common. I hope this helps you get into the Christmas spirit this week.

## I

### *Two Lines of Biblical Prophecy*

When it comes to the Messiah, there are two lines of prophecy in the Old Testament. Some Scriptures predict his glorious arrival and eternal kingdom, while others predict his suffering and death.

For instance, one of the clearest messianic prophecies is found in Isaiah, ‘*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this*’ (Isa 9:6-7). Although the word ‘king’ does not appear, this prophecy is clearly royal. It mentions: government, Prince, throne, and kingdom. The Messiah “wins” here.

Yet if we jump ahead in the same book, we read that the Messiah will suffer and die. Isaiah speaks for the Messiah: ‘*I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting*’ (Isa 50:6). Even more poignantly, we read in chapter 53:

<sup>5</sup> *But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.* <sup>6</sup> *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* <sup>7</sup> *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.* <sup>8</sup> *By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?* <sup>9</sup> *And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth* (Isa 53:5-9; cp. Acts 8:32; Mark 14:61; 1 Pet 2:23).

Isaiah is not alone in talking about the suffering and death of the Messiah. We also read about it in Psa 22, Zech 12 & 13, and elsewhere. In passages like these, the Messiah “loses.”

So how do we reconcile these two lines of prophecy? They seem contradictory. How can Messiah win and lose at the same time? Some Jewish scholars resolve the difficulty by postulating two individuals: a suffering Messiah and a victorious Messiah. Others emphasize the latter to the neglect of the former. They have no category for a suffering Messiah.

I submit that there are not two messiahs, but one. All the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah are fulfilled in one person: Jesus Christ. So then how do we account for these two disparate lines? They hold together in the two advents of Christ.

A word of explanation: *advent* is a word that has come to be associated with Christmas. It is a transliteration of the Latin word *adventus*, which means ‘coming’ or ‘arrival.’ This in turn renders the Greek word παρουσία, which denotes a in-person visit from a king. So when we talk about advent, we are talking about the coming of Christ, especially as a king.

The Bible mentions two advents of Christ—the first one at his birth, and the second at his return in the last days. The former is history for us; the latter is still future. When the Christians in Rome began to celebrate advent around the sixth century AD, the celebration initially focused on the Second Advent. It was not until the Middle Ages that they began to use the season to prepare for Christ’s birth, but even then it focused on both advents.<sup>1</sup> So, in liturgical churches today, the Second Advent is celebrated up to Dec 16, and the First Advent is celebrated from Dec 17-24.

We’ve just finished our series on Daniel. We saw both lines of prophecy there. Chapter 9 mentions that ‘*an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing*’ (Dan 9:26a). That’s a reference to the suffering of Christ. But then chapter 7 says ‘*one like a son of man*’ will be presented before the Ancient of Days, and he will be given ‘*dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall*

*not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed*' (Dan 7:13-14; cp. 2:44). That's a reference to the victory of Christ.

We can see both in the New Testament—sometimes side-by-side. For instance, Peter alludes to '*the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories*' (1 Pet 1:11). Paul shows in the great Christ Hymn in Philippians 2 how Jesus humbled himself to the lowest place, so God exalted him to the highest.

So these two lines of prophecy are fulfilled in one person. Suffering and victory appear side-by-side in the two advents of Christ.

## II

### *Differences between the First and Second Advents*

Let's consider, then, several differences between the First and Second advents. They are substantial. I'm going to allude here to many different Scriptures. They tend to be well-known, so I'm not going to read them all in their entirety. If you're the type of person who likes to write down cross references, just grab me after the service, and I'll give them to you. Or perhaps we can post them online.

#### **Mode**

Let's consider the mode of each advent, that is, the way in which Jesus comes. In the First Advent, Jesus comes *secretly*. He's born in a lowly stable—likely a cave where sheep were kept. He's unnoticed. No pomp and circumstance. **Not like Simba**. The only people to visit the newborn king are a group of shepherds—one of the lowest social classes in Israel at the time (Luke 2:8-20). When the wise men arrive many months later, they go to Jerusalem and ask those in authority, '*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*' (Matt 2:2). No one is even aware that he has been born. They have to look it up in Scripture, to find out where his birth had been prophesied to occur.

In the Second Advent, Jesus comes *openly*. Jesus says, '*For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man*' (Matt 24:27). He will ride upon the clouds (v.30; cp. Dan 7:13). Every eye will see him, from the least to the greatest (Rev 1:7). He will go from obscurity to maximum exposure.

In the First Advent, Jesus came *humbly*. He took the lowest place. When he added a human nature to his divine nature, he did not come fully developed. He could have just shown up as a fully grown man, like an angelic visitation. But, in the wisdom of God, he had the full, ordinary, human experience. **Charles Spurgeon** refers to the miracle of the incarnation in four words: "Infinite, and an infant."<sup>2</sup> The Eternal, Self-Existing One submitted to the gestation process. The Omnipotent One had to be carried, fed, and changed. The Omniscient One learned how to walk and talk. In fact, he had to learn all manner of knowledge and wisdom. The Sovereign of the universe submitted himself to human parents (Luke 2:51-52). Furthermore, he was born into a poor family. He was not a good-looking man; he had no regal bearing nor airs of royalty (Isa 53:2-3). He

went through puberty. His voice changed. Maybe he had pimples. He devoted his life to the service of others. He allowed himself to know hardship and privation; to feel pain; to suffer shame; and—ultimately—to die (Phil 2:5-8).

This is in sharp contrast to celebrities today. For instance, when singer Beyonce appears in a show, she makes the following demands:

- All crew members must wear 100 percent cotton clothing.
- Alkaline water must be chilled to 21 degrees and served with \$900 titanium straws.
- Bathrooms must have new toilet seats and red toilet paper.
- Hand-carved ice balls must be made available after the concert for her to cool her throat.
- The luxury dressing rooms must be newly refurbished, with enough space to accommodate an entire sports team.

Quite different from Christ's incarnation. A fourth-century Christian named Theodotus put it this way. In the incarnation, God "chose surroundings that were poor and simple, so ordinary as to be almost unnoticed, so that people would know it was the Godhead alone that had changed the world."<sup>3</sup>

Ye the Second Advent will be different. Then Jesus comes *gloriously*. '*they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*' (Matt 24:30; cp. Tit 2:13). He will have the highest, most exalted place (Phil 2:9-11). When he returns, he's going to look like this: '*one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead*' (Rev 1:13-17a; cp. Dan 10:5-6). This is the beloved disciple writing this—the one who leaned tenderly against Jesus at the last supper. Now he's terrified of Jesus in his glorified state.

So the difference in mode between the two advents is stark: Jesus goes from weakness to strength; from lowliness to majesty; from an ordinary body to a glorified body. In the First Advent, he is the Lamb of God (John 1:29); in the Second, he's the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5). In the First, he wears a crown of thorns (Matt 27:29); in the Second, he bears the ruling scepter and sits on his eternal throne (Gen 49:10; Psa 45:6; Heb 1:8).

### **Purpose**

Now let's look at the purpose of each advent. In the First Advent, Jesus came to serve, particularly by sacrificing himself to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus says this about his mission, '*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*' (Mark 10:45; cp. Luke 19:10). At the Second Advent, however, he is going to be served (Rev 22:3).

In the First Advent, Jesus came to save: '*I did not come to judge the world but to save the world*' (John 12:47; cp. 3:17; 1 John 3:5). But in the Second Advent, he

is coming back to judge and deliver God's vengeance on his enemies: *'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him'* (Jude 14-15; cp. Acts 17:31; 2 Thes 1:7-8). So the First Advent was to show mercy; the Second is to dispense judgment.

### **Result**

Let's also look at the result of each advent. The First results in shame; the Second results in vindication (Heb 12:2; Acts 17:31). Jesus was seemingly defeated in the First; he will be triumphant in the Second. Few bowed before him at the First; everyone will bow at the Second (Phil 2:9-11). Christ achieved the beginning of our redemption in the First by dealing with the penalty for our sins; he will consummate it in his Second by removing the very presence of sin. His First Advent was temporary. He lived on this earth for 33 years, then ascended to heaven (John 13:3). His Second Advent, however, will be eternal, and we will be with him forever: *'and so we will always be with the Lord'* (1 Thes 4:17).

The differences between the two advents is captured well in Hebrews, *'But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him'* (Heb 9:26b-28).

## III

### *Similarities between the First and Second Advents*

Yet not everything is different between the two advents. Before we finish this meditation, let's briefly examine a few similarities.

Both advents involve a bodily existence. Jesus is going to return in the same manner he left, that is, personally and bodily (Acts 1:10-11). It was prophesied that the Messiah would be called *Immanuel* (Isa 7:14), which means 'God with us.' God came to earth in the incarnation. When Mary stared into the face of Jesus, she was beholding her maker. As songwriter Michael Card observes, it's the only time in history that a mother was made by her own child. God was in-person. At the end of Revelation: *'And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God"'* (Rev 21:3). God will be here in-person. **It will not be a Zoom meeting!** Paul says, *'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known'* (1 Cor 13:12).

Both advents involve salvation. In the First Advent, Jesus secures the way of salvation; in the Second Advent, he finally delivers his people.

The church father Augustine says, “God became a man for this purpose: since you, a human being, could not reach God, but you can reach other humans, you might now reach God through a man. And so the man Christ Jesus became the mediator of God and human beings. God became a man so that following a man—something you are able to do—you might reach God, which was formerly impossible to you.”<sup>4</sup>

### *Conclusion*

We need both these pictures for a proper understanding of Jesus. If we look only at his birth, we have an approachable Jesus who’s a really nice guy. If we look at only at his Second Coming, we have a terrifying, fire-and-brimstone Jesus. Here’s the thing: Jesus is both of these. His First Advent emphasized one, and the Second Advent emphasizes another. But they are two sides of the same person.

How does this stuff affect us?

It gives us hope (Titus 2:13). It gives us comfort (1 Thes 4:18). It purifies us (1 John 3:2-3; 2 Pet 3:11-12). Prompts us to live for God and love others (Heb 10:24-25). Watchfulness/urgency.

Just as the prophecies about Jesus’ first coming were fulfilled, we can also rest assured that the prophecies about his second coming will also be fulfilled.

The people of that day were looking for a conquering Messiah; they got a meek and gentle one instead. Ironically, the people of our day might be looking for a meek and gentle Messiah, but will get a conquering one instead.

Pastor David Peterson was preparing his sermon, when his little daughter came in and said, “Daddy, can we play?”

He answered, “I’m awfully sorry, Sweetheart, but I’m right in the middle of preparing this sermon. In about an hour I can play.”

She said, “Okay, when you’re finished, Daddy, I am going to give you a great big hug.” She went to the door.

Peterson said, “Thank you very much.” Then he explains what happened next: “Then she did a U-turn and came back and gave me a chiropractic, bone-breaking hug.” The pastor said to her, “Darling, you said you were *going* to give me a hug *after* I finished.”

She answered, “I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to!”

Dale Bruner then concludes, “One meaning of Christmas is that God wants us to know, through this First Coming, how much we have to look forward to in the great Second Coming.”<sup>5</sup>

## Prayer

### Worship Songs

I ended the sermon early so we could have more time to sing.

### Benediction

The Bible ends with an expectation of Christ's second advent. In the second-to-last verse, Jesus promises, '*Surely I am coming soon*' (Rev 22:20). That word *soon* can also be rendered 'swiftly, rapidly.' In other words, Jesus was not predicting he would come tomorrow or the next day. Rather, this stuff is going to happen quickly and unexpectedly: '*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*' (1 Cor 15:2). Then the Apostle John adds, '*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen*' (Rev 22:20-21). And that is my benediction to you as well. Helen and I wish you all a very, Merry Christmas!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2007/november/1111907.html>. Accessed 12/18/20.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1996/november/375.html>. Accessed 12/19/20.

<sup>3</sup> [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com). Accessed 12/19/20.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2007/november/2120406.html>. Accessed 12/19/20.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2000/december/12750.html>. Accessed 12/18/20.