

***"Signs"***

We are all hearing songs that this is the most wonderful time of the year, and just last night we had an amazing parade through downtown Douglas that reminded all who were present that we are leading up to an amazing event - and that is Christmas Day. Oh, how we prepare and make sure that we send out our cards, and check our lists - at least twice – so that we don't forget someone or that we get the size or color right.

How do we know that this time of year has come? Well it depends on what you use as your guide. Some folks use the football season, or the bowl games to signal the end of the year and the beginning of "the holidays." Others might use the stores to remind them that it is time to start making their lists and checking them twice. Let's face it we are all in tune with seeing the signs and reacting.

Speaking of signs – I remember the old saying "red sky at night – sailors delight, red sky in morning – sailors take warning." We are always checking the sky to see what is going on! You see dark clouds rolling this way – you cover over the furniture or get the pets in – because the storm is coming. I thought of this when during our trip to Israel in July we climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, overlooking the Jezreel Valley, where the Prophet Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal. Shortly after he finished with them the Bible says "*Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.*"<sup>43</sup> "*Go and look toward the sea,*" he told his servant. *And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."*<sup>44</sup> *The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea."* So Elijah said, "*Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'*"<sup>45</sup> *meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.*<sup>46</sup> *The power of the LORD came upon Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.* (1Kings 18:42-1 NIV) Long before Al Roker, the Weather Channel, and meteorologists - people looked for signs in order to prepare.

Signs are all around us – we drove down to Jacksonville Friday night to attend a worship service led by a friend of ours, recording artist and amazing Messianic minister – Paul Wilbur. On the two and a half hour ride home we were surrounded with a very thick fog. We relied on the minimal of signs – because we were blinded – we barely saw lights ahead or the lines in the road – but these signs helped to keep us on the right road. It became clear to me that we use whatever is before us in hopes of seeing the right way to go.

Seeing signs is always important - but I think what is even more important is **what we do with what we learn from the signs**, right? For example – did you know that in our local schools the children not only prepare for emergencies – with fire drills, but they also prepare with tornado drills? It is best to be ready – just in case! We can see the signs but what we do with that information is crucial!

King Solomon was considered to be the “wisest” of kings – and he is believed to have written Song of Songs, also known as Song of Solomon. He is also credited with writing Ecclesiastes, the Book of Proverbs, and the apocryphal book of Wisdom. He humbly wrote these words from Proverbs 30. I really have to wonder how many faithful Jews and Christians have over the centuries read these words and never drawn the conclusion that it can only be about God – **the Great I Am - and His Son?** *"Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!"* (Proverbs 30:4) This sign is right before us – and have you seen it? I know that now I will never forget it.

Jesus tells us very plainly that we are to expect incredible signs – and we need to pay attention! In today’s Holy Gospel from Luke 21 Jesus says: *“when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”* (Luke 21:28) We are called to have hope instead of fear – while others will be fainting in fear, we have Christ. The signs that are happening around us are not supposed to make us lose heart, but to be strengthened in our walk of faith. In the midst of the heavens and earth being shaken, we can rejoice in the Lord Jesus. We can get through any of those times, as unpleasant and downright atrocious as they may be, because we have a God who is faithful and will see us through it all. We have a God who will not abandon us in the midst of the roaring of the sea, but will be coming with *“power and great glory.”* (Luke 21:27) We suffer through these times, but we will never suffer them alone. We can stand firm in the midst of the signs, because our salvation is at hand – our redemption is drawing near! Right after today’s Gospel Jesus continues to describe His coming again. In His description Jesus encourages us, *"But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place and to stand before the Son of Man."* (Luke 21:36)

Jesus reminds us to prepare; to have faith; to be ready. During this season of Advent, we are preparing for the coming of Jesus. As a matter of fact, just this past Wednesday evening people were preparing Chrismon ornaments and symbols, signs for the Chrismon tree that you can see is right in the back of the church – to help us to prepare for Jesus’ birth and His coming again. So how are we supposed to prepare? We can ask forgiveness, repent, pray, and best of all we can get in His Word. Quite often, people use Advent Devotionals with information about an Advent Wreath - and have suggestions for you as you gather at your dining room table and light the Advent candle each evening - if you have one - that you might use for prayer for that day – preparing as a family for Christ’s coming. Jesus tells us to watch, and to wait for He is coming. He is coming this Christmas and coming again at the end of time to redeem the whole world. He is coming to claim those who know Him and belong to Him.

In this Gospel Jesus gave us an additional sign speaking of the fig tree. *“He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. <sup>31</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> "I tell you the truth, this generation will*

*certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*" (Luke 21:29-33) The fig tree in Holy Scripture is a symbol of the people of Israel described by Isaiah, Hosea and Joel. Hosea wrote *When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree.*" (Hosea 9:10) Isaiah wrote *"The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight."* (Isaiah 5:7) The fig tree is unlike the olive, oak or evergreens that all grow on the Mount of Olives, where Jesus was speaking. Unlike the others – the fig tree loses its leaves in the winter and unlike the almond, which flowers early in the spring – the fig tree shows new life and growth when the weather is warm, Georgia in the summer type of warm. Could it be that Jesus is alerting us that when the Nation of Israel is reborn –the kingdom of God is near? Do you remember the UN vote to establish Israel in 1948? The Nation of Israel has been reborn. When these signs appear – be ready! The clock is ticking!

The Apostle Paul brings further meaning to what Jesus was speaking of when He told us that He was coming again. *"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope."* <sup>14</sup> *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."* (1Thessalonians 4:13-17)

These are just a few of the signs of the times. Speaking of signs, I can remember riding in my car and seeing a sign which said, "Jesus is coming, are you going?" I guess it isn't so important that you know the signs, or see the signs of His coming; the key thing is our being ready when He does come. We are called to seek first the kingdom of God – just to hear Jesus say, *"Well done thou good and faithful servant."* Every other goal, every other dream, has to be placed under what should be our main goal—to live for Jesus, and to make Him Lord and Savior of our lives.

- We need to get ready!
- We need to start right now –

For when Jesus comes again – it will be "ready or not!"