

ADVENT MEANS IT'S COMING

The season of Advent and the turn of the Christian year on Sunday, December 1st, is a reminder that “now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.” Advent means “coming”, and it tells us our destiny is inexorably on its way. That destiny is defined by the traditional theme of Advent, The Four Last Things. Death, judgment, heaven, and hell, invisibly, silently, “this way come.” Dawn, or Twilight, are just over the horizon.

Death, judgment, and hell come to us because we lost heaven in the first place. There is an apocryphal legend that tells why it was Lucifer left heaven, and brought us down with him. It seems that God began to create, and he decided to give each of his new creatures a gift. Lucifer, a name which means morning star or light bringer, was the first of his creations. God was so pleased with Lucifer's perfection that he gave him the gift of beholding the face of his maker.

And God gave to each of his lesser creatures gifts in their turn: to

the stars he gave music; to the mountains, strength; to the fox he gave cunning; to the waterfall, majesty; to the serpent, wisdom; to the dove, gentleness; and to the rabbit he gave speed. So God continued to create, and to everything he gave a virtue, because he saw that it was good.

Last of all God made man, but when he looked around he had no virtue left to give. All the creatures held their breath to see what he would do. God looked upon man and said, “Everything I have I gave away. I have nothing left to give you, but myself.”

So wonderful was this last best gift that every creature, in imitation of their creator, gave a portion of their gift to man, making the frail, naked, tail end of creation strong and wise, swift and cunning, the image of his maker. All gave a portion, that is, except Lucifer.

He was so offended and jealous because the last had become first, he said to God, “You may give yourself to man, but he will never see your face.” With that, he jumped over the rim of heaven and fell into darkness.

But in his haste he dropped his gift from God.

Now, while the rest of creation could see the image of the maker stamped on him, man could not see it. In desperation, says the legend, man vaulted after Lucifer. It is Lucifer's gift that men are looking for still, though they have long forgotten its name. In the darkness they seize on anything they stumble across, hoping against hope that it is the lost gift.

We have a test for these consolation prizes. We call it happiness. If the thing we seize can make us happy, it must be heaven. It is, of course, a fool's game. There can be no happiness without seeing the face of God. And that is a gift. It can never be captured by any effort of ours. It is still God's alone to give. For the legend says, that when Lucifer dropped his gift, it was God who picked it up.

We are like Alice in Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass. Having got into the house in the mirror, Alice finds her way into the garden. The first living person she sees is the Red Queen. Thinking to talk to her, she approaches the Queen,

only to find she is walking straight away from her. Every time she tries to get to the Queen, her efforts take her further away. Only when Alice finally gives up trying to make her own way to the Queen, and turns around, does she walk right up to her majesty.

We can't cease desiring heaven any more than we can cease desiring bread. But satisfaction is not within our powers to achieve. Yes, we do have work to do, God given work that seems to take us away from seeing his face. But like Alice, it is doing those unheavenly duties, praying and loving, sacrificing, wearing ourselves to a frazzle, bearing the burdens which make happiness seem so far away, that in truth take us right up to heaven's gate. For when we give up finding it for ourselves, heaven makes its way to us. It really is Coming.

The Rev. Steven McClaskey



© 2004 DoveTracts, Inc.

Advent Means It's Coming

