

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY

24th November Last Sunday of the Church Year

HYMNS: 272 735 487 434

INTROIT: Psalm 93

The LORD reigns; He is clothed with majesty; the LORD has clothed Himself; He has fastened on strength as His belt. Surely the world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.

Your throne was set in place long ago. You are from eternity.

The rivers have lifted up, O LORD, the rivers have lifted up their voice; the rivers are lifting up their pounding waves.

The LORD in His place on high is mightier than the sounds of many mighty waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea.

Your testimonies are very reliable. Holiness adorns Your house, O LORD, for days without end.

COLLECT: Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS: Isaiah 51:4–6 But my salvation will last forever.

Jude 20–25 “Keep yourselves in the love of God.”

Mark 13:24–37 You do not know when that time will come.

Isaiah 51:4-6

⁴ “Pay attention to Me, My people! Listen to Me, My nation! For Teaching will go out from Me, and I shall establish My justice in an instant as a light for the peoples. ⁵ My righteousness is near. My salvation will go out, and My arms will bring justice to the peoples. The coastlands will put their hope in Me and wait eagerly for My arm. ⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look at the earth beneath! For the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth **will wear out like a garment**, and those who dwell in it will die like gnats. However, My salvation will last for ever, and My righteousness will not be frustrated.

Jude 20-25

²⁰ You, however, dearly loved people, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit! ²¹ Keep yourselves in the love of God and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to give you eternal life! ²² Some people have doubts. Show mercy on them! ²³ Save others “**by snatching them out of the fire**”! Show mercy to still others, with fear, detesting even the garment stained by the flesh!

²⁴ Furthermore, to Him who can keep you from falling and to make you stand without fault and with great joy in His glorious presence, ²⁵ to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power and authority, before all ages and now and for ever and ever! Amen.

Mark 13:24-37

²⁴ “However, in those days, after that distress, **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.** ²⁵ **The stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens** will be shaken. ²⁶ Then people will see **the Son of Man coming in clouds** with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then He will send the angels and **gather His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.**

²⁸ “Learn this parable from the fig tree! When its branch has already become tender and puts out leaves, you know the summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things happening, you know He is near, at the doors.

³⁰ “Truly, I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until these things all take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will certainly not pass away.

³² “No one knows about that day or hour, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³³ “Beware and be on the alert! For you do not know when the time will be. ³⁴ It is like a man who was away on a journey. When he left home, he put his slaves in charge, assigned each one his task and ordered the doorkeeper to keep watch. ³⁵ Therefore, keep watch! For you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at the time when the rooster crows or early in the morning. ³⁶ Make sure that, if he comes suddenly, he does not find you asleep! ³⁷ What I tell you, I tell everyone: ‘Keep watch!’”

“KEEP WATCH!”
Sermon on the Last Sunday of the Church Year 2024
Mark 13:24-37

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Mark 13:24-37: **“However, in those days, after that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. ²⁵ The stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ Then people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then He will send the angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.**

²⁸ **“Learn this parable from the fig tree! When its branch has already become tender and puts out leaves, you know the summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things happening, you know He is near, at the doors.**

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Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today, on this the Last Sunday of the Church Year, we are once again given the opportunity to be reminded that Judgment Day is approaching when we shall **“see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”**

The Word of God makes it clear that Jesus Christ is coming again to gather His elect from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. The One who created the world, who redeemed and restored the world by His death and resurrection, is coming back, as we confess in the creeds, to judge the living and the dead *in perfect justice*.

When He returns, all will know Jesus of Nazareth, the One who lived two thousand years ago, died on the cross, was buried, and rose again. Everyone will see the One who is Lord over all, the very Son of God, the Messiah. He was made incarnate, carried out a public three-year ministry, was crucified to pay for our sin, was bodily raised from the dead, exalted over all things, and, one day, *will return for all to see*.

In our text for today, Jesus puts it all into perspective. The created world is temporary. Its days, like our own, are numbered. Everywhere we look, we get reminders of this: grey hairs, weak knees, muscle aches, and bones creaking. Machines break. Toys fall apart. The computer locks up. Sometimes, we wonder if we'll ever make it through the day.

Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem for what would be our Lord's last Passover. In the verses before our text, the disciples had looked around as they left the temple, admiring its grandeur. The temple was a magnificent architectural achievement for which the Jews took great pride. It stood as the central place of worship for Jews to bring their sacrifices and offer prayers to God. Here, God had made His dwelling with His people.

Jesus took this opportunity to teach His disciples about the end times and commented that in the not-too-distant future, not one of those buildings would be intact, and not one of the giant stones would be on top of another. The disciples were naturally upset about that, so they asked when that would happen. Jesus then told them about Jerusalem's destruction, taking this teachable moment a step further, pointing the disciples ahead to the times preceding the Last Day.

The end of the world always has a certain allure for us, and Jesus' disciples respond in a very understandable way. They wanted to know, "*When will this take place?*" That's still what seems to fascinate people most about the end times. Why have Judgment Day and the end of the world always been such attention-grabbers? To the world, they represent dramatic action and a cataclysmic battle between good and evil that must be seen (and, of course, scripted into a multimillion-dollar book series or movie). To believers, Judgment Day and the end of the world are the fulfilment of the promises of God centred in Jesus, the

joyful end when we finally fall into the arms of a waiting Saviour, who has the victory over sin, Satan, and death.

Yet to a world that thirsts to be entertained and believers who hunger to spend eternity with God, Judgment Day and the end of the world seem so far into the future and so foggy with unclear interpretation that any little detail is as valuable as a road sign when you're lost. There are some things about Judgment Day we know. In a flash, all people will be gathered before Jesus, including those who have died, their bodies raised to rejoin their souls. But there are some things about Judgment Day we don't know, *especially when it will occur.*

Throughout history, many have predicted the end of the world, but they have been totally and terribly wrong. What does Jesus say? He tells us, "*Don't believe them.*" He says, "**No one knows about that day or hour, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**" According to His human nature, Jesus laid aside the full and constant use of His divine omniscience and used it only when it became necessary for His redemptive work. It was not part of Jesus' work to reveal the exact date of His Second Coming. Yet, while we don't know when the Last Day will come, Jesus does give us some insight.

We know we must always be on the alert for Jesus' return, for He continues, "**Beware and be on the alert! For you do not know when the time will be.**" ³⁴ **It is like a man who was away on a journey. When he left home, he put his slaves in charge, assigned each one his task and ordered the doorkeeper to keep watch.**"

Jesus wants us to be alert, on guard, to keep watching for Him to come at any time. Jesus underscores this by illustrating a man who leaves home and places his slaves in charge while he's away. Jesus is the "man," the Church is the "house," and we believers are the "slaves." The first point Jesus makes with this picture is that we in the Church are to "**keep watch!**" as He says—for His return *at any moment.*

First-century Christians believed Jesus would return in their lifetime. They lived in that hope and expectation, waiting, watching, and longing for His appearance.

The message to us today in this twenty-first century is the same as it was to those in the first century: we don't know when He will return, so always keep ready. Jesus says in Luke 21:34: "*But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.*" Jesus warns us about being dulled by worldly concerns.

The Lord Jesus told His followers what they could understand and did the same to us. For us Christians, life is full of trouble every day *precisely* because we are Christians. But we can understand this too: “*The one who endures to the end will be saved,*” Jesus reminds us (Matthew 24:13). We do not walk on this troubled road alone. Jesus walks with us as we watch and wait. The Holy Spirit will empower His redeemed to make a witness before those who hate and persecute them; they will be given words of proclamation for those who persecute and punish them, murder and martyr them. We can endure to the end because Jesus lived, died, and rose for us.

So, are we paying attention to the signs of the last days? Are we going along with the current or fighting the good fight of faith? In his short Letter, Jude directs us *to be built up in our most holy faith, keeping ourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.*¹

Dear friends, Christ is coming! And when He does, we shall “**see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.**” In the end, it’s all about Christ, who is the Alpha and Omega—the Beginning and the End. For “*no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Cor. 2:9).

For those in faith, those who trust in Jesus Christ alone, this is not terrifying but wonderfully assuring. We can await His coming with joy—for He assures us that He comes with life, with light, with forgiveness and hope, and He comes to put sin and death in their eternal places, once and for all.

Be built up—assured! —by His words and stay ready for the Day of the Lord by undergirding your life with those words of the Lord. Your Lord Jesus has daily comfort, promises, and gifts and blessings to pour into your life as He cares for you with His Word and Sacraments and calls you to a new and glorious life with Him. “**Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will certainly not pass away.**”

The Word of the Lord endures forever, so we can endure until the end. So, put on the armour of God. As you have been forgiven, so forgive. As you are loved by God, so share that love with others. As He serves and cares for you, so serve and care for others. As you have received the Good News of salvation in Christ, so share it with others that they, too, may know Him and be with their Saviour in

¹ Jude 17-21

the mansions He has prepared in heaven. As you are comforted, bestow that comfort. Live as believers who already belong to eternal life. And this is eternal life, that you know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent².

The Day of the Lord is coming. The signs are all around us. We're living in the last days. It won't be easy for you as a believer but don't be afraid. Christ will soon come again in righteous judgment to take you and all believers in Him to be with Him at His side. Until then, He's at your side. His coming may be sudden, but its certainty calls us to a life of joyful expectation. Be assured by His coming! Live as believers who long for the day of His appearing. Pray that day will be here sooner rather than later when there will be no more headaches and heartaches, fears and tears, troubles or trials, strife and sorrow, just God's grace in fullest measure, eternal life. The Lord's desire for you is that His return would not be a day of terror for you but triumph in Him.

The One who is coming has come so that we might live. The Babe of Bethlehem became the Good Friday Saviour and the Easter hope for the whole world. As Christians, we live in Him now by faith, and on that Last Day, we shall be with Him forever in love! That's good news for us and for all who believe. With faith in Christ, there is forgiveness for all of our sins. There is hope when things seem hopeless. There is life after death. There is eternity. With Jesus, we are more than conquerors. That's why Jesus lived, died, and rose for you. So, stay alert, and be assured. Jesus is coming!

“To Him who can keep you from falling and to make you stand without fault and with great joy in His glorious presence,²⁵ to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power and authority, before all ages and now and for ever and ever! Amen.” (Jude 24-25).

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

² See John 17:3

PRAYER FOR THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

Lord God, heavenly Father, You have created all things, all things exist through You, and all things serve Your purposes. To You be glory for ever! We thank You for all Your goodness, for giving us life and all the gifts of body and mind, for daily providing all our needs, for blessing us with the joys of home, family, and friends, stable government, and all advances in science, medicine, and the arts. But above all we thank You for the gift of Jesus Christ, through whom we have Your choicest gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. Grant that through Your Spirit we may respond to Your love with faith and love in lives dedicated to Your service, as we wait for Jesus to return in glory and receive us into His eternal kingdom. Preserve us from false teaching and moral wickedness. Give us concern to build one another up in our most holy faith, fill our lives with earnest prayer in the Spirit, and make our whole lives a doxology to You.

Grant that we may be ready for Jesus' second coming. Move us to work untiringly to spread Your Word that many may be brought to saving faith in Him before the end comes. Extend His rule over all nations of the earth.

Bless our own country. Give Your wisdom to those in authority that they may rule humbly, serve uprightly, lead wisely, and plan intelligently. Give us freedom, justice, and unity throughout our land.

Protect our homes from the evil influences of the world, the lies of Satan, and the foolishness of sinful human nature. Grant that the parents among us may love and honour each other, and live as heirs together of Your gracious gift of eternal life. Grant that our young people may be eager to grow in the faith. Grant that the young children may grow in favour with You, their elders, and one another.

Remember the poor and the needy; lift up the weary and the wounded; heal the sick and the diseased; strengthen the aged and the infirm; provide for the invalid and the unemployed; give hope to the worried and depressed; and guard all facing danger or oppression. Give them relief in Jesus Christ from their darkness and sorrow.

Almighty God, You have told us that soon the Last Day will come, when Your voice will once again shake the heavens and the earth. Give us joy and confidence in this, that we inherit the eternal kingdom, which cannot be shaken. Give us firm faith and patient obedience, so that, when Jesus appears with all His holy angels, we may be dressed in the white robes of His salvation. All this we pray in His precious, saving name. Amen.

Article: Joy to the World! The Lord is Come!

You may be surprised to learn that the hymn *Joy to the World* is not a Christmas song. That is right, in spite of this hymn being in hundreds of hymnals underneath the category of “Christmas,” Isaac Watts originally wrote this song in 1719 to be about the ‘second’ coming of Jesus.

If you look closely at the lyrics, *Joy to the World* is based upon a Bible passage that talks about the joy that the world will have when Jesus comes back a second time to make all things right (check out Psalm 98).

So, since this is the case, should we take our hymnals and tear *Joy to the World* out of the Christmas section? Should we rip it out of the beginning part of our hymnal and place it with those hymns about Jesus’ second coming? Or, should we start a crusade to ban all churches from singing this song during the time of Christmas? No, we need not be this intense. Singing *Joy to the World* during the Christmas season is very fitting, even though it is not technically a Christmas song.

When we sing *Joy to the World*, we remember that Christmas isn’t over. Even after we take down our Christmas trees and put our Christmas decorations away in boxes, Christmas continues. Sure, when Jesus was born, He fulfilled many promises and prophecies from the Old Testament; however, we must not forget that there are still many Christmas prophecies and promises that have yet to be fulfilled.

For example, in verse three of *Joy to the World*, we sing,

“No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.”

Now, this third verse states that Jesus makes His blessings flow as far as the curse is found. And where is the curse found? It is found everywhere we look. All creation is under the effects of the curse. When you see death, there the curse is. When you see police cars, locked doors, passwords on your computers, PINs for ATM machines, and gates around houses, well... these are things that attempt to restrain the effects of the curse. Wars, rumours of wars, plagues, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, and flooding? These are the effects of the curse, as well. The curse of sin has fallen upon all of humanity and all of creation, wreaking havoc on everyone and everything. And so, wherever we look, the curse is found.

However, with the first coming of Jesus, blessings flow as far as the curse is found. And what is that blessing? It is the blessing that the One who was born in Bethlehem and went to Jerusalem's cross blesses you with the forgiveness of sins. When Christ died on that cross and rose from the grave, it was not just for a select few, but it was a blessing that flowed to everyone – as far as the curse is found.

Jesus came to that manger to go to your cross so that He would redeem you from the curse by becoming a curse for you.

And so, you and I have joy this Christmas Season because Jesus was born... to die... to forgive... you and me.

But remember that the hymn *Joy to the World* speaks of the Second Coming of Jesus. And so when we sing this hymn during Christmas, we are confessing that Christmas began long ago in Bethlehem and that Christmas isn't over yet. It is true that Christ fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies by being born into time, space, and history, but many promises of Christmas have not yet been fulfilled. We shall have more promises fulfilled when we receive our King Jesus when He comes a second time again.

And when He comes a second time, blessings will flow again "as far as the curse is found."

When Jesus comes a second time, everything that the curse has corrupted in this life – from coast to coast, from north to south pole, and down to the smallest of molecules – will be reversed. In Christ's Second Coming – a second Christmas - there will be a new creation. No more thorns and thistles in the ground. No more disease and dying in your bodies. No more fear and shame in your mind. No more curse, for the blessing, power, and might of Christ will reverse the curse!

So today, we sing *Joy to the World*, with joy not only because Christ came that Christmas long ago, but we know full well that Christ will come again! We sing with joy because, in Jesus' First Coming, the blessing of forgiveness flows as far as the curse is found. We sing with joy because, in Jesus' Second Coming, the blessing of a new creation will flow as far as the curse is found.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Joy to the world, the Lord will come.

Joy to the World

Children's Message:

Today is the Last Sunday of the Church Year, so in our Gospel from Mark, Jesus talks about the Last Day of the world.

What's going to happen on the Last Day of the world? Lots will happen, but what'll make it all happen is that Jesus will come back from heaven to earth.

When Jesus came to earth for the first time, He looked very ordinary, not like anybody, especially important. He even let His enemies kill Him because by dying on the cross,

He took away everyone's sins—even theirs. Then Jesus rose again and went up to heaven. But on the Last Day, Jesus will return as a glorious King with all His angels, and



everyone who's ever lived, even those who died long ago, will stand before Him. Then He will take to heaven everyone who believes Jesus is the Saviour, and those who didn't believe will be lost to hell.

So Jesus doesn't want anyone to be unprepared for that Last Day. Not believing in Jesus or not being sorry for sins is being unprepared, not ready—like someone driving a car being asleep at the wheel, not ready for whatever may happen.

We're ready for Jesus' return by believing He died to save us, and we stay ready—stay awake—by hearing God's Word, always being sorry for our sins, and receiving the forgiveness He speaks to us.

Dear Jesus, help me to always be ready for when You come again to take me to be with You forever more! Amen.

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

1 December 1 Advent (Year C)	8 December 2 Advent	15 December 3 Advent
8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA HC 9.00am GRN LR 10.45am AUB HC 9.00am MARBURG LR 7.00am Advent Tea AUB	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD HC	8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 7.00pm MARBURG (Children's Christmas Program)
Sunday, 1 December		
READINGS: Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 19:28-40		
HYMNS: 2 19 6 (840 334) 4		
Sunday, 8 December		
READINGS: Malachi 3:1-7b; Philippians 1:2-11; Luke 3:1-20		
HYMNS: 9 13 317 (311 842) 11		
Sunday, 15 December		
READINGS: Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:44-7; Luke 7:18-35		
HYMNS: 3 1 402 (754 161) 17		

PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE OF SERVICES FOR **8 and 15 DECEMBER!**

Sunday, 1 December, 7.00pm. Advent tea at Aubigny. Could each family please bring a plate and something for dessert?

Wednesday, 4 December, 10.00am. Women's Guild at Bethlehem Toowoomba. This will be our break-up for the year. We shall hold Bible Study in the hall and exchange gifts (please bring a gift to the value of \$10.00), followed by lunch at the Toowoomba Hockey Club. (There will be no choosing of a verse or an item of interest.)

Saturday, 7 December, 7.00pm, YAY (Young Adults and Youth) is on at Aubigny, with the hall open from 6:30pm. Please bring yourself, your Bible, and a plate to share for supper, for an evening of games, food, socialising, and a devotion.

Friday, 20 December. 7.30pm. Carols Evening at Trinity Oakey.

Sunday, 22 December. 9.30am. Bethlehem Toowoomba. Downs Children's Christmas Service.

BIBLE STUDIES: Sunday, 1 December, 8.00am TMBA.