[First Sunday of Advent](https://justmehomely.wordpress.com/2012/12/01/first-sunday-of-advent-year-c-3/) November 28, 2021

Look Out, Not Up!

An American missionary in Africa saw the need to have the Bible translated into the local language. He wrote home asking for financial support. One old lady in the parish, who thought the young missionary should have known better, wrote to give him some advice on the matter. “I do not think Africans need a new translation,” she argued; “If the King James Bible was good enough for St Paul, it should be good enough for the Africans.” Our good old lady does not see that in order to preach the good news in any meaningful manner, there is a constant need to translate not only the Bible but also the very message of Christ in a way that the people can relate to. That is why King James had to have the Bible translated from the original Hebrew and Greek into English for the use of English-speaking Christians, in the first place, in 1611, about 1610 years after St. Paul’s time by the way. In today’s Gospel we see how Luke translates Jesus’ teaching on the Last Days in order to make it more meaningful and relevant to his readers.

Today’s Gospel is taken from Luke, whereas most of our gospel readings since November last year came from Mark’s Gospel. The 1st Sunday of Advent, marks the beginning of a new liturgical year. Today we move from the year of Mark (B) to the year of Luke (C). In fact, today’s gospel is Luke’s version of the gospel we read two weeks ago from Mark. Luke wrote his gospel many years after Mark. He knew the Gospel of Mark and included much of Mark’s gospel in his own, making necessary changes to make it suitable and relevant to his readers. A minor example is in the story of the healing of the paralytic, Mark tells us that the bearers of the sick man dug through the roof (Mark 2:4) but Luke tells us that they removed the tiles (Luke 5:19). Mark had in mind a Palestinian house with earthen roofs. Luke, on the other hand, had in mind a Roman audience, and Romans made their roofs with tiles. As today we read Luke’s version of Jesus’ teaching on the Last Days, we should pay attention to the way Luke retells the story, in order to find out Luke’s slant and particular emphasis in this important teaching about the Last Days.

Comparing Mark 13:24-32 which we read two Sundays ago with Luke 21:25 which we read today, we see that Luke has left out all the spectacular sky events which Mark associated with the Last Days: “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven” (Mark 12:24f). Luke rewrites this with more restraint: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars” (Luke 21:25). Again, Luke leaves out altogether Mark’s idea that the Son of Man “will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (Mark 13:27). Why does Luke leave out these easily observable and verifiable forecasts in Mark? For one thing, Luke now knows better. Mark wrote his gospel sometime before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In his days Jewish Christians had supposed that the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple would coincide with the end of the world. But the fall of Jerusalem came and went, and the world did not end. So, Luke, writing about the year AD 80 had the advantage of hindsight which Mark did not have.

The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple touched off a big crisis of faith for the early Christians. Because the expected end of the world did not come with it, many of them gave up altogether their belief in the Second Coming of Christ. They quicky settled for earthly pleasures, like eating and drinking, and gave in to moral laxity. To address their needs, Luke added the second half of today’s gospel, exhorting them to be on their guard so as not to be weighed down with “dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life” (21:34). The word translated “dissipation” here signifies the state of nausea that comes after eating or drinking too much.

Advent is a time to prepare for the coming of the Lord. Generally, we understand this to be his coming on the Last Day and his coming at Christmas, which recalls his historical birth 2000 years ago. Luke reminds us of another coming which we tend to forget, namely, his daily coming in the ordinary events and people in our lives. Luke’s emphasis is that we should be vigilant to recognize and welcome the Lord who comes to us without warning every day in people, places, and events we least expect. If we are preparing for the Lord’s coming by looking up to the sky, Luke today invites us to look out, to look into the story of our daily lives and recognize the Lord who comes to us in ways we least expect.