

Today is the Fourth Sunday in Advent, on which we continue to watch and pray for the Lord to come. But the light is getting brighter as we light the fourth candle of our Advent wreath, reminding us not only that Christmas is almost here but that Jesus' visible return is just around the corner.

That's what the 6th stanza of our last hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," reminds us of as well. We sang, "O come thou Dayspring from on high, and cheer us by Thy drawing nigh!" (LSB 357). The Word "dayspring" is a good illustration of this time just before Jesus' visible return on the Last Day. Dayspring in nature refers to the first light of day, just before the sun becomes visible (And I've seen some beautiful daysprings or dawns here in Delta—Delta Dawn's). Those beautiful daysprings are a fairly sure sign that the sun will be coming up soon, even though we don't see it yet. Because of our faith in nature—our faith that the sun will come up, we may already be getting ready for the day ahead (or putting our head under the pillow, whatever the case may be). The dayspring is a good sign that the sun is on its way.

In our hymn we referred to Jesus as the "Dayspring from on high." He is the Son, S-O-N, of God who has already given us the light of life through His Word this morning, especially in the Absolution, saying: "*I forgive you all your sins.*" In the light of that Good News we eagerly look forward to seeing Jesus' shining face. We are "[cheered] by [the signs of] His drawing nigh."

I'm sure it was that way with Mary and Joseph just before Jesus' birth. Even though they had not yet seen the Christ child, they were still "[cheered] by [the signs of] His drawing nigh." In our text, Mary was given some reassuring signs that she would give birth to the Son of God. Her relative Elizabeth, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called Mary, "*the mother of my Lord.*" And when "*the sound of [Mary's] greeting came to [Elizabeth's] ears,*" the baby in Elizabeth's womb, who would be John the Baptist, "*leaped for joy.*"

Another reassuring sign was the fact that Mary's stomach was growing larger. Mary didn't have to wait to see the baby Jesus face to face for Him to bring joy to her life. Her words in the Magnificat gives us a sample of the joy she felt even before Jesus' birth. Mary lived in the blessed assurance of her Savior's arrival and sang, "*My Spirit rejoices in God my Savior*" (Luke 1:46-47).

God also gives **us** physical signs of our Savior's visible **return**, which make us joyful even now. Besides the dayspring each morning, other signs include "*wars and rumors of wars... famines and earthquakes* (and tornadoes?). Jesus called these things, "*the beginning of birth pains*" (Mt 24:8)—signs that His visible return is just around the corner. And as the troubles of this world increase, like contractions just before childbirth, so also does our eager expectation for Jesus' visible return increase. Keeping this in mind gives us joy in the midst of suffering.

Like Mary and Joseph, however, our faith in the coming of our Lord receives its greatest assurance from God's sure Word. Without God's Word the physical signs would mean nothing. But when God promises us something in His Word, it's guaranteed—it's as good as done. We have His Word on it! And we have seen God's faithfulness in the past.

When, after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, God promised that the “*offspring*” of a woman would bruise/crush/overwhelm the head of Satan, along with all his works (Gn 3:15), no power in heaven or on earth was able to stop God from fulfilling His promise of salvation through His Son and offspring of a woman, Jesus Christ. Once God promises something it’s guaranteed, and it’s only a matter of time before it happens.

Christ our Savior was, therefore, just as real to Adam and Eve as He was to Mary and Joseph. Why? Because God promised that He would come. As sure as they were that the sun would rise each morning, they could be even more sure that God’s Savior would be born to bring light to their sin darkened lives. By giving them faith in that Good News, God enabled them to live joyful lives even before it happened.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s Word gives us this same assurance and faith. How confident are you that the sun will rise tomorrow morning? You can be infinitely more certain that our Savior, Jesus Christ, who was born for us; who suffered and died on a cross for us to pay for all our sins, and who rose from the dead for us, will return for us. By the grace of God we can live in that assurance even before His visible return. Jesus, our resurrected Savior, promised it, therefore it’s guaranteed. We have God’s crucified and risen Word on it!

By giving us faith in His Word, God enables us to live each day of our lives already celebrating our salvation, and all the more as the troubles of this world, like the contractions before childbirth, increase. Rejoice, rejoice, the Dayspring from on High cheers us [by the signs of] His drawing nigh!

Let us pray. Lord, may the light of Your Word and Holy Supper continue to strengthen our faith in Your promises, making our celebrations this Christmas season, in the midst of a world full of troubles and fears, signs which draw others to the Dayspring from on high. Lord in Your mercy...

[Children’s Sermon] Why do wrapped presents under your Christmas tree make you so excited and happy, especially when the tags on them say that they’re **from** someone like your parents or grandparents, and that they’re **for** you? You’re excited because, even though you can’t see what’s inside, you know that your parents and grandparents love you, and you remember that they have given you good things in the past. So you excitedly expect that wrapped present to have something good in it for you. And on Christmas day you quickly open it to see what’s inside.

The Bible is like a Christmas present, with each day being Christmas. It’s **from** God the Father, who has given us good things in the past, especially His Son, Jesus, and it’s **for** you and all people. So you quickly open it’s cover, like unwrapping a gift. When you do, you find Jesus on every page, with His Father and the Holy Spirit, letting you know how much He loves you, that He is with you right now, and that through His birth, death and resurrection He has planned for you and your whole family an eternal vacation in paradise.

So, when ever you’re sad or afraid, open up the Bible and read it (or ask someone like your parents to read it to you), and God will assure you of His unstoppable love and plans for you and all your whole family; an eternal vacation in paradise! [Give children a copy of Luke 1&2].