

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Great and awesome shall be the Day of the Lord. *“In those days ... the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken,”* says Jesus, echoing the words of the Prophet Joel, *“The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood,”* which will happen, the prophet said, just *“before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”* (Joel 2:31).

Great and awesome, indeed, is the Day of the Lord, and fearsome. Yet it is not to frighten the elect that this great and magnificent day comes, but to bring to an end a great tribulation and to fulfillment their salvation. Our Gospel picks things up *“in those days, after that tribulation,”* but surely those who are alive at the glorious coming of the Lord will have had to endure that tribulation *“such ... as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be”* (Mark 13:19).

Jesus will come again after this tribulation — a document on the “End Times” put out by our CTCR calls this time “Satan’s little season,” referring to the time that Satan will be loosed to wreak havoc on the world, deceiving many, seeking to destroy the church. Indeed, the time will be short and shortened, Jesus says, by His return *“for the sake of the elect, whom [God] chose,”* otherwise, He says, Satan would be successful and *“no human being would be saved”* (Mark 13:20).

But the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church of Christ; we have Jesus’ promise. Satan will not be successful; Christ will see to that. Therefore, on that day we will *“see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”*

How glorious! Another promise made and another promise kept. You recall how Jesus departed from this earth to ascend to His Father in heaven — lifted up, a cloud taking Him out of sight (Acts 1:9). You recall what those angels who accompanied Jesus told the disciples: *“This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11).

But this time, Jesus will be flanked on all sides by His holy angels, and they will announce His return *“with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God”* (1 Thess. 4:16). Jesus will come to *“send out the angels and gather his ELECT from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”* The harvest angels will be sent out to gather those whom the Father had chosen from the foundation of the world in Christ Jesus *“that [they] should be holy and blameless before him”* (Eph. 1:4). They will be sent to gather those whom He had *“predestined ... for adoption ... as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will”* (Eph. 1:5). They will assemble the

elect before the throne of Christ that He might give to them their inheritance — *“the kingdom prepared for [them] from the foundation of the world”* (Matt. 25:34).

Does that sound comforting? Reassuring? It should. This message is meant for you who believe — to comfort you. It’s not meant to frighten unbelievers into faith ... as if that’s how one comes to believe. No, Jesus tells you this so that when times of trouble come upon you, you can know that He is there for you, that the Father has not only chosen you and has written your very name into the Book of Life, which, I was reminded this week, our Confessions identify with Jesus Himself. But the Father has also ensured that you will hear and believe, as Luke bears witness to: *“when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed”* (Acts 13:48). How comforting! God the Father has not only predestined you, but through His Spirit, He has also *“called [you through His word and Sacraments], and ... justified [you by His grace through faith], and ... glorified [you]”* (Rom. 8:30).

This is how He blesses *“us in the Beloved”* (Eph. 1:6). By His word, which *“will not pass away,”* God leads us to Christ. We listen to His words and come to believe. We hear the voice of our Good Shepherd and follow after Him. We hear what He offers us in this Word through water and Supper; we partake, and He keeps us in this faith.

This prophetic and apostolic word of God ultimately is what we cling to if we wish to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). It is a word outside of us — *extra nos* is the Latin phrase — that testifies that it’s only “out of pure grace, without any merit of our own, we have been elected in Christ to eternal life” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. XI:13). Our human reason wants to take credit for it, but Scripture doesn’t allow it. Our salvation does not stand in *“the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”* (1 Cor. 2:5).

*Extra nos!* Outside of us. The Greek mathematician Archimedes was famous for saying, “Give me a place to stand and I will move the world.” He understood the power of a lever, and how it works. He understood the need to stand outside the world with his lever if he were to move it. It doesn’t work from within. So also “we require a foothold outside ourselves and all the world in order to be able to maintain ourselves against the world, the devil, and our own [sinful nature],” wrote Francis Pieper. “All these powers, including our Ego, oppose us, particularly in the matter of the assurance of our salvation and the assurance of the truth. There is such a position, lying outside of ourselves, providing a firm and safe footing. That is the Word of Christ” (Pieper, I:117). *“If you abide in my word,”* Jesus said, *“you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:31-32).

For there is a truth — Jesus is that truth. And the truth is that you have been chosen in Him, called to Him, justified by Him, and will be glorified with Him. And you can know this truth for certain by abiding in His enduring word and believing it, by looking to the Son and believing in Him. Then, you can know for certain that you have been chosen; then you will be comforted that you are among the elect.

And then, when that great and awesome day comes — whenever that may be, for we know not when; indeed, Jesus will return unexpectedly, like a thief in the night — but when that day comes, be assured that Jesus will send His angels to gather you up, and He will *“present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy”* (Jude 24). He will place you as sheep on His right hand, and say to you, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matt. 25:34).

In the meantime, we wait. And as we wait, *“Be on guard; keep awake!”* Let us *“give attention to [the Lord].”* Let us be about the work the Lord has given us to do. By His word, let us build *“[ourselves] up in [our] most holy faith,”* being fervent in prayer, *“keep[ing ourselves] in the love of God,”* feeding on the food that endures to eternal life, as we wait *“for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* And thus prepared, when that day comes, we will say to our Lord and Savior *“who is able to keep [us] from stumbling and to present [us] blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy”* ... we will say to Him as we receive our eternal inheritance: *“to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.”*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.