

Are you ready for the end of the world?

Three brothers grew up, went to high school together, but then – as often happens – went their separate ways. One brother felt the calling to the priesthood, went to seminary, and was ordained. The second brother met a wonderful young woman while he was in college, married her and settled down to raise a family. The third brother started off like the second. He went to college, landed a good job, got married and bought a nice house.

But then one day he started complaining that he got nothing out of going to mass and fell in with a cult led by a self-proclaimed prophet who claimed that the end of the world was near.

The man got so involved with the cult that he began to ignore his wife and children. After he refused counseling, his wife gathered up their children and moved out to escape his rage and constant ranting about the imminent coming of the end of the world.

Sadly, the man hardly even noticed that he had lost his family.

Then, one day, following the instructions of the cult leader, he quit his job, sold his house, his car and all the rest of his possessions, converted the proceeds into gold, and climbed a mountain with all the rest of the cult members to await the end of the world.

They sat around a large campfire, sang songs and gave testimony to the wisdom and far-sightedness of the prophet and how **LUCKY** they were to have his leadership at this difficult time.

Then, just as the sun began to rise, the prophet urged them to get up, dress in pure white robes, and stand at the precipice to face the dawn of what they believed was their last day on earth.

They stood and they waited ... and they waited ... and they waited.

But the dawn of **THAT** day was just like the dawn of every other day.

The end of the world did **NOT** come.

Finally, looking at each other sheepishly, they turned to ask their leader what they should do next.

But the prophet was gone.

So was their gold.

And, for many, so were the lives they had thrown away to follow this –

FALSE – prophet.

...

Likewise, there was a young man who went to the mall to get a book on “The Rapture,” a term many protestant fundamentalists use for the end of the world. He was teaching his Sunday School class about the Rapture but couldn’t remember the title of the book.

After listening to the teacher’s description, the bookseller said, “Oh, you must mean *One Hundred Reasons Why the Rapture Will Come in 2009*.”

“Yes!” the young man exclaimed. “**THAT’S** the book I need.”

The clerk nodded and said, “That’ll be \$29.95 ... unless you want the 2008 edition ... which I can let you have for half price.

...

We can smile – and even laugh out loud – at these foibles ... but you might be asking yourselves “What does **THIS** have to do with **ADVENT**?”

I mean – after all – this is the season in which we get ready for **CHRISTMAS**.

Right?

Right.

But ... contrary to the popular media, this is **NOT** the “Christmas season,” it’s the **ADVENT** season!!! The Christmas season will start ... well ... on Christmas!

The word “advent” comes from the Latin word **ADVENTUS** which means to **EXPECT** or to **ANTICIPATE** something ... or some**ONE**.

Obviously, we most generally think about this word as referring to the season in which we anticipate the **FIRST** coming of Jesus Christ, his **BIRTH** in Bethlehem.

And so it is ...

But ... hold on ... there is **ANOTHER** meaning to the word ... and to the season.

The Latin word “adventus” is, in turn, a translation of the Greek word **PAROUSIA** which is most commonly used in reference to the **SECOND** coming of Christ ... that **RAPTURE** the young teacher in the story was referring to.

You noticed – I’m sure – that today’s scriptures all referred to what we often call “**THE END TIMES**” ... and waiting for the Lord to come.

In the Old Testament Scriptures, Jeremiah wrote about how the ancient Hebrews awaited the Messiah – that descendant of David – who would rule Israel from Jerusalem’s throne and keep it secure forever.

The psalmist, too, sang about waiting for God.

In his epistle to the Thessalonians – who thought the earthly reign of Christ was near – St. Paul advised them to conduct themselves in ways that would please God and to adhere to the instructions given them through the Lord Jesus.

Finally, in the Gospel, Luke shows us an entirely **DIFFERENT** Jesus from the one who went about doing good, healing, turning the other cheek, and giving us the Beatitudes.

THIS Jesus preached about the **END OF THE WORLD!!!**

THIS Jesus preached about signs in the heavens and about nations being dismayed and confused by what was happening.

Interestingly enough, these are things about which the popular media are trumpeting this very day ... famine, plague, war, tsunamis, volcanoes, global warming, and signs in the sky.

But ... **BEWARE!!!**

In all three synoptic gospels – that is, Matthew, Mark and Luke – Jesus warns his disciples **NOT** to be taken in by false prophets. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus says: “See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' **DO NOT FOLLOW THEM!**”

Elsewhere, he advises them that **NO ONE** – save the Father – knows the day, nor the hour.

So, do **NOT** be taken in by any “end of the world” hysteria.

Do **NOT** follow these false prophets, whether they be men or their alter egos: the popular media.

Just like the false prophet in the first story and the author of the book in the second, **NO ONE** knows when the end of the world is coming!

There have been so-called prophets watching the skies and news of natural and man-made catastrophes for **MILLENNIA!!!**

The “Heaven’s Gate” cultists didn’t know ... although they certainly thought they did. No, not even the ancient Mayans knew when the world would end.

NO ONE DOES!!! No one knows when Christ will come again.

That’s why Jesus and St. Paul told us to be **VIGILANT** ... but to conduct ourselves as we should.

Will we be like the priest and the second brother who followed God’s call to their respective vocations ... living their lives fruitfully and in accordance with Christ’s teachings?

Or will we chase shadows with abandon, following after false prophets like the man who foolishly gave up everything and stood on the mountaintop staring up at the sky ... ?

For us – **IN THIS AGE** – the only **SURE** “end of the world” will come for us on the day we die and meet Jesus face-to-face in Heaven.

I am **FAR** more concerned about how I will be judged when my personal world ends than on how or when the world itself will end.

How about you?