

The Fulfillment

Scripture reading opportunities: Matthew 24 and 25; Luke 1:26-80

This isn't an "Advent meditation". But it *is* an Advent meditation. Those with some exposure to modern physics may think of *Schrödinger's Cat*. The subject isn't the beginning of the church year (the "First Sunday in Advent", which is already here), but rather The End. But, fortunately for us, the Beginning and the End are inextricably linked by the birth, death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In a wonderful children's message on December 3rd, Betsy Warren explained that the church's calendar doesn't start on January 1st, but rather with the beginning of Advent. Advent is that four week season in which we prepare for the birth of Jesus into flesh and into history. But the week *before* Advent begins, not coincidentally, marks the *end* of the old church year. The last Sunday of the church year is known in some traditions as the Sunday of the Fulfillment. And the Sunday of the Fulfillment traditionally focuses on the End Times: scripture readings often include passages like Matthew 25:31-36 – the Son of Man, separating the sheep and the goats. Eschatology (the study of the "last things") abounds even in relatively staid churches on The Last Sunday (of the church year). Keep watch, for none knows the hour!

So what's the fulfillment in *that*? For the Christian, the Fulfillment is God's delivering on His promise to deliver those who believe in Him. We are called to be *aware* of all of the apocalyptic stuff, and to *abide* it, but we *don't* have to fear it. Jesus said, and Paul also wrote, that the bad stuff, the "wars and rumors of war", are the "birth pangs" that *have to happen* before the New Creation comes (Matthew 24:4-8; Romans 8:22-24). We need to be aware, but we *don't* need to fear. The *fulfillment* of "the Last Sunday" (of the church year), then, is the coming of the eternal kingdom – the climax of the whole of God's creation and man's history. So *that's* pretty fulfilling, isn't it?

But, it strikes me that the *last Sunday* of the church year also looks forward to the *First Sunday* of the church year --- the *Fulfillment*, in mankind's history, of the promise made by God to His creation way back when (Genesis 3:15) and propagated though several millennia of pretty rough times (e.g., Isaiah 7:14-16 and 9:6-7). That is – the promise of the Messiah. The story that opens the New Testament (Luke 1:26-56) is also a *fulfillment*. The Advent season, and the story of Christ's physical entry into mankind's world, is perhaps the real *climax* of the story; the End Times are more like the Denouement. Jesus is the catalyst of the Fulfillment of the Last Sunday, and His birth is the Fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 3:15.