

The Second Coming

DOGMA & THEOLOGY

A Doctrine of Watchfulness, Not Speculation

The Church confesses that the Lord Jesus Christ 'shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.' This lesson studies the Second Coming not as a topic of speculation but as a doctrine of watchfulness. You'll consider Christ's omnipresence in the time between His ascension and His return; the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as a type of the final coming; the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as an abiding presence of the Son; the unknowable hour of His return; and the signs that precede His appearing, including the Antichrist, the Great Tribulation, and the renewal of all things in the New Heaven and New Earth. The Church places this entire mystery before you neither to instill fear nor to inflame curiosity about dates, but to form in you a life of vigilance, repentance, and sustaining hope. 'Watch therefore,' our Lord says, 'for you do not know when the master of the house is coming.'

Present With Power

Christ's First Coming and Second Coming don't negate the fact that He is omnipresent. The First Coming extends from His Nativity to His Ascension. In the time between the First and Second Comings, His presence remains with you, especially in the Eucharist and wherever two or three are gathered in His name.

"And He said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.'" Mark 9:1, NKJV

A Threefold Fulfillment

In parallel sayings, the Lord tells His disciples that some standing with Him will not taste death till they see the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:27) and the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Matthew 16:28). The Church has long contemplated these sayings, and the Fathers have seen in them a threefold fulfillment:

- the Transfiguration, in which the divine glory was shown to Peter, James, and John;
- the Resurrection and Pentecost, by which the Kingdom was inaugurated in power; and
- the ongoing reality of the Kingdom as it breaks into the world through the Mysteries and the lives of the faithful.

Already and Not Yet

These interpretations aren't rivals to one another. Each opens a dimension of the same truth: the Kingdom is both already and not yet. It's already present through the Eucharist, the Church, and the life of grace; it's not yet consummated in the fullness that awaits the Second Coming. This tension is deeply pastoral. It keeps you from dreaming of the Kingdom as only a future prize and from reducing it to a

merely present experience. You live between the two advents, receiving the first and waiting for the second.

Two Comings Already Glimpsed in History

This coming of Christ was already apparent on two occasions in the first century, each showing His Kingdom present with power through the preaching of the Gospel by the early Christians: the judgment that fell on Jerusalem, and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Both deserve a closer look, because both teach you something about how God comes.

The Destruction of Jerusalem

The destruction of the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is reckoned by the Fathers as a 'coming' of Christ; a coming in judgment upon the city that rejected Him. Our Lord foretold it plainly:

“See! Your house is left to you desolate.” Matthew 23:38, NKJV

“When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” Matthew 10:23, NKJV

In the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21), the Lord intertwines His words concerning the destruction of the Temple with the language of His Second Coming. This isn't confusion. The events of A.D. 70 are a type; a shadow prefiguring the final judgment. What happened to Jerusalem stands as a solemn witness that the Lord isn't indifferent to the rejection of His voice, and that every 'house' built apart from Him will finally be found desolate. The destruction of the Temple therefore matters for your spiritual vigilance. It teaches you to read history with the eyes of faith and to recognize that God's comings, whether in judgment or in mercy, are woven through the fabric of time.

The Descent of the Holy Spirit

The prophet Joel foretold signs in connection with the Day of the Lord, and he connected these signs to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

“The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.” Joel 2:31, NKJV

Pentecost as a Coming of the Lord

At Pentecost this prophecy began to find its fulfillment. The Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles; they spoke in tongues; and the proclamation of the Gospel went forth into the world. The Fathers of the Church understood this descent as a 'coming' or 'presence' of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, for the Spirit who descended is the Spirit of the Son.

“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you... What is this power except the Son Himself — 'Christ the power of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24)?” St. Athanasius — Discourse Against the Arians

St. Athanasius equates the promised power of the Spirit with the Son. The arrival of the Spirit is not an independent act but an extension of the Son's power, revealing the unity within the Godhead. Christ told the Apostles they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:8), and St. Paul names Christ Himself as 'the power of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24). Pentecost, in other words, isn't simply an isolated event in the past; it's a continuation of Christ's ministry in the life of His Church.

Every Divine Liturgy, every anointing, every breath of repentance is a participation in this same descent. The Lord hasn't left you alone between His comings. He is present with you by the Spirit, who is Himself the presence of the Son until the Son returns in glory.

When Is Christ Coming?

Throughout the New Testament, the theme of Christ's Second Coming is consistently accompanied by an emphasis on its unpredictability. The Lord Himself repeatedly stressed that the precise timing of His return would remain unknown until the moment it occurs. This is not a puzzle withheld to tantalize us; it is a pastoral strategy intended to form in us a constant readiness.

“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” Matthew 24:44, NKJV

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Mark 13:32, NKJV

“Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming — in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning — lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” Mark 13:35-37, NKJV

The Book of Acts likewise records the Lord's answer to the disciples' last question before His Ascension: 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority' (Acts 1:7, NKJV). The consistent message of the New Testament is clear: the time of Christ's return is unknown and unpredictable. Attempts to calculate the date are not only futile; they miss the whole point of the teaching. The unknown hour is itself the lesson. It calls the Church to vigilance — to live each day as though today were the day, and to live each day faithfully as though our days were many.

What Events Will Happen Before the Second Coming?

Before walking through the signs themselves, keep three things in mind. First, the element of surprise is part of the teaching itself — these events aren't given so you can chart a timeline, but so you recognize the pattern when it appears. Second, it's possible some of these things have already occurred in part and will occur again, more fully, before the end. Third, some incidents may be repeated metaphorically

rather than literally, echoing earlier fulfillments without being identical to them. With that caution in place, three things happen in the time between the Ascension and the Second Coming.

1. All Things Restored

The period between the Lord's Ascension and His Second Coming holds a special name in the apostolic preaching. It's called the 'times of restoration.'

"Whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." Acts 3:21, NKJV

These moments of restoration aren't reserved only for the final day. They began long before, at least by the time of St. John the Baptist. The Lord Himself said:

"Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him." Matthew 17:11-12, NKJV

The groundwork for the restoration of all things was laid before the Lord's Ascension and continues to unfold through the ministry of the Church. Hebrews calls this the 'time of reformation' (Hebrews 9:10, NKJV) — an age in which the shadows of the Old Covenant give way to the reality of the Gospel. This current age is therefore dynamic and evolving. It's marked by the ongoing process of restoration initiated in the preaching of the Baptist and fulfilled at the coming of the Lord. It's a time in which external observances alone don't suffice; what's required is the living relationship of faith in Christ nourished by the Mysteries of the Church.

2. The Conversion of Israel and the Times of the Gentiles

St. Paul unfolds a profound mystery concerning the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles in the economy of salvation.

"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.'"
Romans 11:25-26, NKJV

A partial blindness, the Apostle teaches, has come upon Israel. It isn't permanent but temporary, lasting until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. When that fullness is attained, a turning point will occur, and 'all Israel will be saved.' This doesn't require that every Jewish individual receive Christ; it speaks of a national restoration and a profound spiritual awakening. The Apostle's teaching is undergirded by the Lord's own prophecy:

"They will... be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Luke 21:24, NKJV

The relationship between Jew and Gentile in the divine economy isn't one of replacement but of grafting. The Gentiles are grafted into the olive tree of Israel, becoming partakers of the promises

originally bestowed upon the patriarchs. You wait not for the triumph of one branch over another but for the ingathering of all into the one Body of Christ.

3. The Beginning of Sorrows and the Great Tribulation

The Lord describes a progression of signs that will precede His return. These signs fall into two stages: the Beginning of Sorrows and the Great Tribulation. The Beginning of Sorrows is characterized by:

- False christs: deceptive figures claiming the name and role of the Messiah, drawing many astray.
- Wars and rumors of wars: global conflicts and escalating tensions producing fear and instability.
- Famines: widespread hunger and food shortage causing suffering.
- Pestilences: deadly diseases sweeping the world.
- Earthquakes: natural disasters bringing destruction and displacement.
- The spread of the Gospel: the proclamation of the Gospel to all the world in spite of these troubles.

The Great Tribulation intensifies these signs. The deception becomes more convincing, with false christs and false prophets performing signs and wonders. The love of many grows cold. A general falling away, an apostasy of widespread scope, takes place. And at length the Antichrist is revealed. These prophecies are given not to instill fear but to cultivate spiritual preparedness.

“It is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour... He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.” 1 John 2:18, 22, NKJV

The first century already witnessed many antichrists in the form of false teachers. Every generation of the Church has seen its own. The pattern continues until the final Antichrist is revealed. In every age, you're called to discern, to resist, and to remain grounded in the truth of the Father and the Son.

The Antichrist

St. Paul gives the clearest apostolic warning concerning the Antichrist:

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, NKJV

A Cryptic Number

The Antichrist is marked by blasphemous self-deification and opposition to God. The Book of Revelation identifies him by a cryptic number:

“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon... Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: his number is 666.” Revelation 13:11, 18, NKJV

A Traditional Reading: The Tribe of Dan

A traditional interpretation holds that this figure will arise from the tribe of Dan. The patriarchal prophecy calls Dan 'a serpent by the way, a viper by the path that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward' (Genesis 49:17, NKJV). The name of Dan is also absent from the list of tribes in Revelation 7:4-8, which has fueled this traditional reading. These clues offer some insight, but the full identity of the Antichrist remains hidden until the appointed hour. The Church doesn't speculate concerning names and dates; she preaches vigilance. The Lord has given you enough to recognize the pattern and to remain faithful. The particulars belong to God.

What Will Happen at the Second Coming

The Lord's return will unfold with a series of manifestations, each a glorious and terrifying sign of the Kingdom established in power.

First: Universal Disturbance

'Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken' (Matthew 24:29, NKJV). St. Luke records the same disturbance from another angle: 'And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken' (Luke 21:25-26, NKJV). St. Peter adds: 'The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up' (2 Peter 3:10, NKJV).

Second: The Sign of the Son of Man

'Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn' (Matthew 24:30, NKJV). The Fathers identify this sign with the Holy Cross, which will shine with a brilliance clearly visible to all when the sun and moon have been darkened. The Cross, which was once the scandal, will be revealed as the throne.

Third: The Appearing of Christ in Glory

'They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory' (Matthew 24:30, NKJV; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27). 'Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him' (Revelation 1:7, NKJV). No one will escape witnessing this return.

Fourth: The Trumpet and the Resurrection of the Dead

'Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed' (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, NKJV). The Lord Himself will 'send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other' (Matthew 24:31, NKJV). St. Paul continues: 'For the Lord Himself

will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, NKJV).

Fifth: The Trepidation of the Wicked

Even on His way to the Cross, the Lord warned of this day: 'Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" And to the hills, "Cover us!"' (Luke 23:30, NKJV). At the Second Coming this cry becomes universal. The kings of the earth, the great men, and the mighty will hide themselves in caves and in the rocks of the mountains, saying to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!' (Revelation 6:15-17, NKJV). Earthly power will offer no refuge in that day.

Sixth: The Final Judgment

'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..." Then He will say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels..." (Matthew 25:31-41, NKJV). The judgment isn't based on abstract knowledge but on the fruit of faith: deeds of love and mercy done for the least of the Lord's brethren are done unto Him.

The New Heaven and the New Earth

After the judgment, the vision of St. John opens upon the eternal dwelling of the redeemed:

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'" Revelation 21:1-4, NKJV

This is not merely the restoration of what was lost; it is a renewal, a transformation into something greater than Eden. The sea, often a biblical image of chaos and separation, is no more. The Holy City descends from God, adorned as a bride for her Husband, signifying the intimate union between God and His people. The tabernacle of God is no longer a temporary structure; it is His permanent dwelling with us. Tears, death, sorrow, and pain — every weight humanity has borne since the fall — are eradicated.

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9, NKJV (cf. Isaiah 64:4)

Living in Anticipation

The hour of Christ's coming is unknown, and as our Lord has said, He will come like a thief in the night. It is therefore for us to stay awake and to watch, lest we miss our time of visitation. The eschatological hope presented in these passages is not a distant ornament added to the Christian life; it is the very light by which we see our present path. It gives purpose to our days, steadies our courage in trials, and fuels our longing for the One who first loved us. This is the life of the Church: living in anticipation of the glorious day when Christ will return and establish His eternal Kingdom.



Review Questions

1. Do we know when Jesus Christ is coming again? (A: NO we don't know and in Mark 13:32 Matthew 24:44 it tells us that we do not know the day or the hour.)
2. In the book of Revelations, it says the “Beast’s” name or his number, what is it? (A: 666)
3. What are some of the signs that will happen before the second coming? (A: Universal destruction, the sign of the son of man, the appearance of Christ in His glory, trumpet and rapture, trepidation of the Wicked, judgment: recompence & chastisement, heaven.)