*I will stand at my watchpost and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what He will say to me and what He will answer concerning my complaint. Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.* Habakuk 2:1-3

*John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves: ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying: “I baptize you with water, but One who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand to clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His granary, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.” So with many other exhortations he proclaimed the Good News to the people.*

 *Luke 3:7-9; 15-18*

*A few days before Christmas two men in Florida decided to go sailing while their wives went Christmas shopping. While the men went out sailing a terrible storm arose. They had great difficulty keeping the boat under control, and as they maneuvered their way back to land, they were grounded on a sandbar. They jumped overboard and had to push with all their might trying to get the boat into deeper water. As they were doing this, the wind was blowing terribly, the waves were rushing up upon them, and they were soaking wet and knee deep in mud. One of the guys looked at his buddy and said: “You know, it sure beats Christmas shopping though.”*

Things to Come

1. As I have already indicated in the past, although Advent is the time when we begin to prepare for the annual celebration of Christ’s birth, this is also the time when we focus on the return of Jesus in the future . The *“Bethlehem’s Christmas,”* may very well be a part of the past, a part of the history, but the *“Christmas Future,”* is still coming, just like the ghost of the *“Christmas Future”* in Charles Dicken’s *“Christmas Carol”* was to come. On that particular night, with the visit by the three ghosts, Scrooge witnessed a possible future, but as Dickens wrote, he was able to change that future by embracing the *“Spirit of Christmas.”* We may suspect what the future will bring, but we do not know when the *“Christmas Future”* will come and in what fashion. We may have glimpses of it in the Scriptures, but as with all the prophecies, the true outcome of the future is never clearly visible and plain. We know that the *“Future Christmas,”* that is, the *“Second Coming of Christ”* as promised by God is still to happen, but until this happens all we can do is to be prepared and to wait for it. Advent reminds us that the future belongs to those who not only may but also are willing to wait. We may remember our past and what God has done for us, and we know what the present is like, but as we look forward into the future we do not know when and how God will finally and fully reveal what we may now see only partially.

2. We do not know a lot about Habakkuk except that he was a prophet contemporary to Jeremiah and Zephaniah. The biblical scholars assume that he made his home in Jerusalem, therefore his prophecy was to be directed to the people of Judah and came in the midst of the tragedy and the military disaster the kingdom faced. Habakkuk sees the future of the kingdom as a very bleak one, but he hopes for eventual recovery and restoration. He may question God’s actions, just as many people still questions God’s actions today when they ask: *“Why is this happening?” “Where were You, O God when this happened?”* or *“Where are You in all of this?”* Habakkuk however knew that although there is a hope for Judah, this was not the time to see it. He knew that God’s vision for the future and of His people is that of an ultimate justice and hope, but to achieve this, the nation needed to be ready. For now Judah was to remain patient and to accept the consequences of the punishment for their sinfulness. Habakkuk knew that the punishment is imminent, so he says: *“Wait for it; it will not fail,”* but he also knows that the restoration eventually will come too.

3. The future always has and always will concern us, but we are not, and never will be able to determine the full extent of the future’s outcome. What we know is the past and the present, and it is our present that enables us to make choices, to formulate decisions and take actions, which will affect the future’s outcomes. Ultimately, the future belongs to God and only He is able to foresee what the future will bring. The Scriptures may help us to prepare for the future, and the Scriptures may help us to witness to others, helping them to make the right choices, but the Scriptures do not reveal to us in full clarity what our future is. Just like Apostle Paul, whom I quoted before has said: *“For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face.”* Regardless of anything, the future is coming as surely as the past is gone, and we are still in a need of getting ready for it, but we are unable to speed it up the outcome of that future or to slow it down. The Jews were waiting for the Messiah to come just as He was announced by so many prophets, and they were hoping for Him to bring the ultimate justice and peace. Unfortunately, when He finally came, only a handful of them recognized and accepted Him for who He was.

4. Many still wait for Him. As His Church we know that He will come again, but this will be the second time He will come to this world, and this time He will not come anymore as a little baby, but as a powerful, Sovereign ruler of His Kingdom. He will come, as Habakuk and the others prophesied. He will come to all of those who like Paul wait for Him. Jesus will come, just like John the Baptist proclaimed before His *“First Coming.”* His Church still waits for Him to come, and come He will, with the ultimate solution. He will come with the set plan and the set of rules that will never end. He will come in His Second Coming and for the believers, when we celebrate Advent although we know we celebrate the past, we also anticipate and celebrate His Second Coming. Ultimately, the First Advent is predictably intertwined with the Second, just as the First Christmas was a prelude to the Second one, the *“Christmas Yet to Come.”* In the season of Advent we must remember that this the time of preparation, the time of waiting, leading to the bright and the clear future. Nonetheless, we must not remain uncertain or have any doubts about it, for if we do, the future will be bleak, and we will lose everything we have achieved with Him so far.

5. Advent reminds us that we do not need to fear the future, whatever this future might be. The reason why we are not afraid of the future is based on having the absolute assurance and faith in the *“One”* who did come in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, and who is still to come in the fulness of time. For the Church of Jesus Christ there is only one outcome, one future, one answer, the *“Kingdom of God.”* This is the reality of our future. In the present we must patiently wait despite of all those who tell us to *“give up”* on waiting, or to *”give in”* to what already is in, that what is but a *“status quo.”* So, although we are waiting patiently, in this Advent season we also need to act by witnessing to the despair, the fear and the uncertainty of the lives and heart of others, those who represent the vast majority of the modern society. Even though our present might seem *“bleak,”* just as it was for the people of the kingdom of Judah in Habakkuk days, when they faced the conquest and the inevitable *“Babylonian Exile,”* as the Church of Jesus Christ we know better, we know that the future is *“bright,”* and the future will bring the true peace and true justice to all when Christ will finally arrive once again. Just as He promised, for He always keep His promises.

6. Habakkuk kept listening and arguing with God, wanting to fully understand God’s message to His people. He saw the people’s sinfulness and saw them turning away from God and he knew that the reckoning is indeed coming. He witnessed this when Jerusalem has fallen, and the people were exiled to Babylon. As a modern society, we the Americans, must also come to grips with the truth that we have fallen away from God and by rejecting Him created our own, imaginary, secular version of the *“peaceful and just society.”* Unfortunately, just as the people of Judah who fooled themselves, so does our secular society and so does our modern world. Without the presence of Jesus Christ in the human heart, without the presence of Jesus Christ in our society, the future of our America is dark and bleak. Still, just as Habakkuk was able to see, there is a ray of hope, a light shining in the darkness in the long *“narrow tunnel”* of a humanistic, godless ideology. After all, God does not one desire for anyone to perish, but to all to come to and to embrace the saving knowledge of Jesus as the only Lord and Savior. So, God is waiting. He is waiting, because of His infinite love for us. Ultimately, it is in His *“waiting”* that the last hope, and the last possibility of the bright future for our nation may be found.

7. As Jesus’ Church, as His own people, we must engage in making sure that the future will indeed be bright and safe. In the *“present”* of our lives, we must work with one another against the darkness of the modern society’s ways, to make sure that the vision of the things to come may indeed be changed. Charles Dickens wonderfully expressed that thought. Only after Scrooge was able to grasp the glimpse of the *“Christmas Yet to Come”* – the glimpse of the future, he was able to embrace the reality of the present and to contain the possibility of the excitement and the wonderful opportunity the future may bring. God does not want us to live our lives like *“Oskar the Grouch”* did, but as the people of hope, the people of light; the people embraced by, and embracing God’s love. The Advent Candles we light every Advent Sunday remind us of the Promise, of Love, of Waiting, and of Joy. These candles also remind us that the time is near and coming, when our Lord Jesus will return to embrace His own. So, like the Apostle John says in the final words of his Book of Revelation, let us also say: *“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”*