

Fling wide the portals of your heart. Make it a temple set apart from earthly use. For heaven's employ, adorned with peace and love and joy. So shall your sovereign enter in. And new and nobler life begin. To thee, oh God, be praised for word and deed and grace. Amen. The word of God for our meditation on this first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of another new church year is found in Luke 17 where we read from verse 20 to verse 30 as follows. And when he was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, lo here or lo there. For behold, the kingdom of God is within you. And he said unto the disciples, the days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say unto you, see here, or see there, go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning that lighteth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven. So shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot. They did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. So far the text. In the name of Jesus, our dear Savior. Beloved Christians, the Christian church is not, as many people imagine, a democracy in which the people govern themselves according to their own will. But the Christian church, as it is pointed out both in the gospel lesson for this Sunday and in this present text, is a monarchy, a kingdom in which the people are ruled by God, by their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In fact, the Christian church is an absolute monarchy. in which the word of the king is yea and amen. An absolute monarchy in which no one has the right to decide or to do anything contrary to the word of the king. No. No member, no pastor, No congregation, no conference or senate, no pope. The word of the king in the Christian church is always supreme. And my dear Christians, that is not a bad thing as it might be supposed by us who live in our beloved country under the form of government which we call a democracy. It is not a bad thing at all to be regretted that the Christian church is an absolute monarchy because our king in the Christian church is not like the kings of this earth. He is a very wonderful, gracious and merciful, very loving king. our dear savior Jesus Christ and his kingdom is altogether different from the kingdoms of this world. It is a kingdom of grace and mercy and righteousness and truth. And now all these things the Lord Jesus particularly emphasizes to us as he presents to us in the word of God which we have just read in this text before us this important theme. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Here we have first of all a very serious and earnest warning to all those who may be only outwardly connected with membership in the Christian church. But here in these words of Jesus is also a very wonderful comfort and encouraging to all and encouragement to all truly believing Christians. First of all, we must see what Jesus means when he says the kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Remember according to our text, he spoke these words. when he was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come. The Pharisees, you know, were a sect of the Jews. They were outwardly connected with the Christian church on earth at that time. They were indeed members and leaders in the church, but they were certainly not members of Christ's holy Christian church, the communion of saints because they did not believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They believed in themselves. They placed all their trust and confidence in their own outward external works of righteousness and not in Jesus their Lord and Savior. They placed all their trust and confidence moreover in their outward connection with the church on earth. And they thought that because of these things they should be favored people of God, indeed distinguished members of his

kingdom. And for this reason they rejected the Lord Jesus. at every opportunity. These Pharisees also had an entirely wrong conception of the kingdom of God. They considered the kingdom of God to be merely some kind of earthly organization, an earthly kingdom in which the Messiah to come would set himself self up again like an earthly king of old such as David and Solomon. That this Messiah would then free these Jewish people from the yoke of the Romans, their conquerors, and give them again the Jewish people, the domination over all their neighboring nations. And thereupon the Lord Jesus spoke these words to them and said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, lo here or low there. For behold, the kingdom of God is within you." He wanted to warn these Phariseaic Jews against their false ideas and their false beliefs. He wanted to point out to them that his kingdom is not of this world as he also testified before Pontious Pilate, but that his kingdom is an a thing and affair of the inmost heart of man. And therefore, he said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. It's not a thing that you can identify with the eye. You can't point to people here or there and say here or there is the kingdom of God. For behold, the kingdom of God is inside of you. It consists of all those and only those who are true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the kingdom of God is completely different from all the kingdoms of this world. The kings of this world establish their rule by force of arms. But the king of the holy Christian church establishes his kingdom by his righteousness and truth and by the attractions of his saving. grace. The kingdoms of this world are further more maintained by fighting with carnal weapons such as swords and guns and bombs and missiles and what have you. But the kingdom of God is maintained. by the preaching and teaching and consistent application of God's precious word, the sword of the spirit, the law of God which crushes the sinful heart which shows up our sins in our need of salvation and the precious good news, the gospel of God's grace in Christ Jesus which then winds up the bleeding in the broken heart and brings the comfort of everlasting life and salvation in the savior of the world. The kingdoms of this world, all the governments of this world are maintained and supported furthermore by the legalistic taxation of their people. While on the other hand, the kingdom of God and his grace is supported by the free willing offerings and sacrifices of God's holy people who because they love their savior and their king want to be just as generous as they can in the support of his gracious kingdom. And so all In all, in every way possible, these words of the Lord Jesus are true. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say low here or low there. For behold, the kingdom of God is within you. The Holy Christian Church consists only and alone of all the true believers in Christ that are in this world. And that is nothing new to us Christians. For we learned that a long time ago already even in our catechism from God's holy word. We learned that the Christian church is invisible to the eyes of men and that only the Lord knoweth them that are his for the simple reason that members ship in the holy Christian church is by faith in Christ Jesus which is in the innermost heart. And only God can see into the hearts of men. We can't look into each other's hearts to see whether the kingdom of God is there, whether we are truly members of Christ's church or not. And the word of God is so plain about these things. We read for instance in the book of Acts 5:14 concerning the church of Jesus that believers were the more added there to multitudes both of men and of women believers. And again the apostle of the Lord writes to the Ephesians chapter 2 and tells them ye are built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, upon the holy word of God, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. And once again, the Lord Jesus says in his great commission, preach the gospel to every creature, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned. And right here, my dear Christian hearers, here is the earnest and serious warning of Jesus in these words. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. The warning is this. You are now members ers of a local Christian congregation. And that is fine. That is a God- pleasing thing. That is what God

requires of his Christian people that they become members of a local Christian congregation of the pure word in their midst. For without that they cannot be properly associated in order to be engaged in the things which God requires of them in his word, that they do not forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is, but that they come together regularly to worship the Lord and to hear his word. Without such membership in a local Christian congregation, one cannot fulfill also the other obligations that Christ makes of his disciples. They cannot also regularly and often partake of the holy supper of the Lord under the proper guidance and supervision of Christ's pastors or overseers. They cannot engage in the various acts of Christian fellowship one toward another that the Lord requires of his people. Their sharing with one another their acts of kindness and love as well as the Christian discipline that he provides in his local Christian churches. So it is a god-pleasing thing when Christians align themselves with a local Christian church. But because the kingdom of God cometh not with observation, you must go farther than that. You must also ask yourself Am I by true, sincere, earnest faith within my heart? Am I also a true member of Christ's kingdom, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, which is known only by God. And you are here now indeed in the house of the Lord in his holy temple to hear his blessed word with your ears. And that too is a god-pleasing thing. For the Lord Jesus tells us, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." He says, "Of those who will not hear his word, he that is of God heareth God's words. Ye therefore hear them not because you are not of God." Those people who habitually and for no good reason absent themselves from the preaching and hearing of God's word are indeed not to deceive themselves. They are not godly people. They are not children of God. And so it is a good thing, a godpleasing thing that you are here with diligence and regularity to hear the precious word of God. and to worship your Lord and Savior in truth. But you must go farther than that too. You must ask whether you are also truly hearing that precious word of the Lord with your heart. Whether you are taking to heart the word that is preached and taught to you. Whether you are truly trusting in the Lord Jesus as your only hope and refuge from sin and death and the power of the devil as your only helper and savior. You are to ask yourselves whether you are also bringing forth the proofs of your faith that you confess with your lips by godly work. of righteousness in your daily life and by the avoidance of all that is sinful and contrary to God's word. You must ask, "Is my faith real and true, or is it just a sham, a mere outward confession of the lips, oh therefore, in this holy advent season when we are beginning another new church year of grace, Examine yourselves as the apostle of the Lord tells you. Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith. Prove your own selves. Make sure that the kingdom of God is within you. Because if it is not within you, then you are not a part of God's kingdom at all. And My beloved hearers, don't postpone such selfexamination because the time is short. Oh, so very short. Who knows whether the Lord will permit us still to live through this new year of grace. Today is the time of salvation. Still today, The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ comes to us a new through the holy word of the gospel. Still today, the kingdom of God is not by observation. It is still a hidden thing known only to the Lord. But the time will come and it's going to come very quickly. As Jesus tells us, like the lightning shining from the east, the the western heavens. The time will come all too soon when the Lord again will appear for his second advent, bringing to light then all the hidden things of darkness. When he then will take to heaven with him to his glorious kingdom, all his faithful believers, but when he will also righteously damn all the unbelievers including all the hypocrites to the everlasting fire and torment of hell. Thus, this message of today, kingdom of God cometh not with observation is indeed a very earnest and serious warning to all those who may only be outwardly connected with the church. But at the same time. Our precious Lord Jesus gives us in this lesson a very wonderful comfort and encouragement for all his truly believing disciples. Notice that this part of our text, Jesus spoke particularly to his own

dear disciples and no more particularly to the Pharisees. For we beginning at verse 22 to the end. And he said unto the disciples, the days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, see here, or see there, go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning that lighteth out of the one part of under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven, So shall also the son of man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark. And the flood came. and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. I say those words spoken to the disciples. Those words of Jesus are full of comfort and encouragement to all the truly believing Christians. It may not seem so when you first hear them read to you or when you first read them yourselves. They may not seem so comforting and encouraging, but they really are full of most wonderful and glorious comfort. You know why? Because they clearly set forth the blessed lot of Christ's truly believing disciples in contrast to the terrible lot of all the unbelievers. Jesus points out that the ungodly children of the world will till the end of time and just keep on enjoying themselves with the pleasures of this world. Like the ungodly people at the time of Noah, they will just keep living it up day after day throughout their earthly existence. The word of God that you and I as Christians bring to them through our preaching and personal testimony. They will reject and scoff at you and I will first have to like our savior bear the cross before we enter into glory. We will have to go into the kingdom of God first after much tribulation. The Lord Jesus teaches us. And because we are faithful to our Savior, we will be hated, Jesus says, of all men for his name's sake. And all that time, the ungodly world will just go on enjoying itself to the full in the treasures and pleasures of this world and in all the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. But then, as it was in the days of Noah, and as it was in the days of Lot, just before the destruction of those cities Sodom and Gomorrah, so also very quickly destruction will come upon those unbelieving, ungodly people. For the Lord, who will no longer come as savior, but who will come then as judge, will appear in the glory of the heavens. And then these people who have wrapped themselves up so in the world that they were not prepared for his coming. We'll have to hear the awful voice of his just anger. Tell them, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. But on the other hand, the lot of the believing disciples of Jesus will be a blessed lot. They to have to suffer much tribulation and trial in this world. Like their savior who first had to suffer and be rejected of their generation before he entered into glory. They too will have to bear a cross with Jesus. For his word nowhere promises us a heaven here on earth, but rather a world road full of trial and sorrow. We'll have to go on bearing a cross with Jesus. And so Jesus points out in this text, his disciples in the midst of all that trial and tribulation will often long to see one of the days of the son of man. In other words, the Christians may feel this way that Oh, they could still be more faithful if only they could have a little look at just a glimpse of the heavenly glory. Or perhaps if only Jesus could be here with them personally on earth once again as he was with his disciples of old to stand right before their eyes and perform some wondrous miracle. But no, says Jesus that will not be permitted for this world is a sinful thing and it's full of sorrow and trial and his kingdom is not of this world. He is not going to come to rule here on earth and make this world our heaven for his kingdom. Om cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say low here or low there. For behold the kingdom of God is within you. And so like your savior, my dear Christians, you're going to have to figure on this and not

be disappointed by it. You're going to have to figure on being under the cross with Jesus. for a time while the world rejoices itself. But oh, not for long. No, not for long, all this suffering and trouble. For the lightning shineth out of heaven in but a moment, and so also will be the coming of the Son of Man, when Jesus again will appear in the glory of his majesty in the clouds of heaven with all his holy angels coming for his second and final advent to this world. And then you know what he will do, don't you? He'll make right all the wrongs and the troubles that you had to go through and suffer for his name's sake while you here on earth among the ungodly children of men. Then he not only will be glorious in his appearing, but he will also glorify you and me as his word promises us. And then he will take us out of this veil of tears to all the glory and joy and peace. Inexpressively wonderful. of his heavenly kingdom. So that now the comfort, the encouragement and the joy of this present advent text before us, the kingdom of God cometh not with observation is simply and wonderfully, most gloriously this, that we Christians can now triumphantly in our Lord and Savior, our precious King, Lord Jesus. We can now lift up our eyes above all the fleeting treasures and disappointments of this present world to the glories that await us in heaven and cry out victoriously and joyfully with the apostle of the Lord. The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Oh God, grant this to all of us for Jesus precious name's sake. Oh come Lord Jesus, come quickly and take thy faithful people home to heaven. Amen. And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.