

On the Lord's Coming Yesterday and Today

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Orthodox Christians believe that the Lord Jesus Christ "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and of his kingdom there will be no end." This confession of faith, contained in the Nicene Creed, was made at our baptism. We reaffirm it at every Divine Liturgy. Hopefully, we recite and repeat it at least once every day of our lives.

The apocalyptic passages in the gospels that refer to the end times are very difficult to understand. Jesus conflates his crucifixion with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the ages. He tells us that we should not try to know when the final end will come, but to be always ready. He says that "of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Mt 24:36). Surely this is a warning to us to be vigilant at all times. "Watch, therefore," he says, "for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13). For the Son of Man will come on the clouds in great glory, with all of his angels, to judge the living and the dead (see Mt 24, Lk 22 and Rev 1-3). Aliens and Exiles

Since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified on earth and glorified in heaven, the end of the ages has come upon us. From the Father's right hand, the glorified Lord sends the Holy Spirit as the pledge and foretaste of God's coming kingdom. Being baptized into Christ in the name of the Holy Trinity and sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have died to this age with Jesus, and we already live according to the age to come.

We endure on earth, the First Letter of Peter tells us, as aliens and exiles. We have here no lasting city, as the Letter to the Hebrews declares, but look for the city to come, whose builder and fashioner is the Lord. This is the new Jerusalem coming from heaven, as witnessed in the book of Revelation.

Every day we Christians pray for the final end of this age. We call for Christ's Coming. We beg for the Day of the Lord to appear in power. The Lord's prayer, given by Jesus to his disciples, is a cry for this to happen. It orders us to petition God with the words, "Our Father in heaven, may your name be sanctified, may your kingdom come, may your will be done, as in the heavens, so also on the earth." This is the perpetual Christian petition in all times and places: "Come Lord Jesus! Yea, Come quickly!" (1 Cor 16:22, Rev 22:20). "I am coming soon"

The scriptures tell us that the Lord is coming soon. The apostle Paul thought that Jesus would return to the earth in glory in a very short period of time. St. Peter's first letter tells us something else. When it became clear that God would allow generations to go by so that those of later times might find life, repentance, and everlasting salvation through faith in God's gospel in Christ Jesus, the apostolic author declares that God's idea of what "soon" means differs radically from ours. It is a great mercy of God towards us that this is so.

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God -- for the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:8-13). Holiness and Godliness

Following this teaching of apostolic scripture, and remembering also the lines of the psalmist that "a thousand years" in the Lord's sight, "are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night" (Psalm 90:4), we can only watch with grateful hearts for God's great mercy and work with great effort to live lives of holiness and godliness in expectation of His Coming.

For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great god and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:11-14). Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus! Yea, Come quickly!

May our God find us to be worthy servants who are waiting, watching, and working according to His Word "so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming" (1 Jn 2:28).