

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL DECEMBER 13, 2013

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SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 23: 27-39

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. 28 So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, 30 and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors. 33 You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell? 34 Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, 35 so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation.

37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 38 See, your house is left to you, desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

DEVOTIONAL

"Woe to you!" Jesus says. It seems an odd text for Advent. As church choirs begin to sing *Joy To the World*, the second half of the Advent season begins with Jesus shouting, "Woe to the Pharisees! Woe to the religiously serious!"

Pharisees were wonderful people, but they had forgotten how to wait expectantly on God. Maybe like the Pharisees it has been so long since you felt God's presence in your life that you have settled for religion instead of hope. You have taken the ancient biblical promises that you learned in Sunday school and buried them in tombs carefully decorated with your religious trophies. But no matter how beautifully you decorate a tomb, you will never find life there.

In bursts Jesus with shouts that call us out of our dark tombs and into the marvelous light of Immanuel, God with us, who resurrects the hopes and fears of all the years that have gone unmet for so long. This is Advent, when Christ shall come to gather his children at last.

PRAYER

Lord, invade our tombs and wash our souls clean. Cast out our fear with your perfect love, so that along with the prophets of old we can once again pray the Advent prayer, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Amen.

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