

²⁵ "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.

²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

²⁹ He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees.

³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near.

³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴ "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.

³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth.

³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:25-36 NIV)

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas

As you look around Somerset you can see signs that the Christmas Season is not only near, but it's here. Somerset had light up night this past weekend, decorations are up and lit, and people have already begun

wrapping and sending presents. There is no doubt that the season of Christmas Movies, Christmas Specials, Christmas Countdowns and Christmas parties is here. And it's not even December yet.

In today's scripture lesson Jesus is trying to help his followers understand that the future is something that God controls, but God does give signs or hints so that God's people will not be taken by surprise. They will know how to tell when the Kingdom of God is near. Even though this story is more than 2000 years old it is still applicable and relevant to today. Just think about the past few months with the anticipation of the coming of fall. For weeks we could see the change in the leaves on the trees. The fall colors seemed to be late this year and when they finally did begin to break out, the leaves fell off the trees. It was a Fall that wasn't or a fall that only lasted a few days. How did you feel when the fall that you were used to did not appear? I felt let down and disappointed and now I am faced with a

choice. Do I let myself be worried about how next fall is going to turn out or should “I lift up my head” and await the coming fall with joy?

About 25 years ago, there were two comets visible in the night sky at the same time. One was called Hale – Bopp and the other was some unpronounceable name. I wondered if they were the sign in the heavens that meant the return of Jesus. Well 20 years later we are still waiting. Should we be living a life of gloom and disappointment because Jesus hasn't shown up yet or should we rather live in hope? Mark Galli, current editor of Christian Today magazine writes: “...if we have a lively hope within us, we recognize God's sovereignty over both the present and the future. This is what characterized early believers, who so looked forward to the Second coming that they were appalled when a brother or sister died before he returned.” He says that Advent is a season designed to help us rekindle what he calls “righteous anxiety”.

How long has it been since you prayed the words “thy kingdom come” and really meant it? During Advent we are challenged look forward to the coming kingdom of God and to look around us for the kingdom of God that has already come. Jesus helps us do both. Jesus helps us see that God's kingdom isn't something we have to wait until we die to get into, it is something we can experience right now in this life. Every time we show God's love by showing love to our neighbor, we make God's kingdom come alive. The Somerset Area Ministerium is a wonderful example of kingdom living right here. And it is no surprise that many of us pastors and lay people have begun to have visions or glimpses of a coming revival and outpouring of the Holy Spirit like what happened in Jerusalem so long ago. There have been prayers services, concerts, community meals, and there is more coming. Let us look forward to this Advent season with righteous anxiety and lively hope because Jesus is not only coming, He is here.