

2020 Advent Theme – The Incarnation and Time  
Third Mid-Week Vespers – The Incarnation and the Future  
Romans 8:1-11  
Colossians 1:15-23

You can't stop time. Thanks be to God; you can't stop time. Surely, you've seen one of those movies where everyone in the scene freezes except for the protagonist. The lead character, mystified at such a development, enjoys the freeze-frame moment briefly and then is led to contemplate some deep meaning to his life and he comes out the other side more buff emotionally. The reason that stuff is in movies is because we fantasize about it – lots of us. How many of us have thought, after some catastrophic event, something that we have caused, as the unhappy consequences of our action is raining down sulfur on our lives and others, how many of us have thought: "Where's the rewind button? Man, just rewind one hour and I'll fix this." Nope; can't stop time. Death, taxes, and time moving forward... pretty much guaranteed.

You can't stop time. Thanks be to God; you can't stop time. Imagine the people of Israel, pinned up against the Red Sea with Pharaoh and his chariots and his horsemen bearing down on them. "Just take us back 24 hours," they effectively cried to Moses. This is a miserable place that you have brought us to, death is snapping at us like a jackal, and we just want to go back. Go back to Egypt, go back to slavery, go back to where at least we can *live*. God doesn't stop time, but He opens it. He opened the Red Sea for there was no going back. What was in front of the Israelites, what was forward in time for them was better. Moses said: "Fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be silent" (Exodus 14:13-14). God planned it and **in time** He executed His plan.

Time is God's domain. He towers over it. He climbs into it. He controls its levers, its progression, its culmination. You can't stop time. On Good Friday, His disciples overcome with grief, Jesus hangs tormented on a cross. It was grace that was raining down, not sulfur, not brimstone. No one liked what they saw and they wanted to go back; back to Thursday night, back to the Upper Room, back to Galilee – anywhere but where they were. There was no going back. What was in front of them was better. "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (Luke 24:5-6). God had planned it; painstakingly planned it and **in time** He executed His plan. Time moved forward and man saw that it was good.

Time is your ally. Time is moving toward a majestic end. Time is moving forward and taking you with it precisely because God has a plan. God did not create a cold, static reality to govern us with senseless precision. God created time to serve as a vessel of salvation. All that He has done, all that He has created has you in mind. You have a future. The Almighty has planned your future and is bringing you to it. "Salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11). Closer and closer – you are drawing ever nearer to the realization of God's eternal plan. No one and nothing can stop it from coming. The towering proof of this reality is that God became man. In that infant, in the baby of Bethlehem, all the fullness of the deity dwelled bodily (Colossians 2:9). There is a time for everything. There was a time for God to be conceived in the womb of the virgin. There was a time for you to be conceived in the womb of your mother. There was a time for you and the Lord Christ to be united. There was a time for

His divine life to invade your mortal flesh. There was a time for His death and resurrection to sweep into your soul and make you new. That reality is for today – a beautiful and precious gift that elevates your life now, a gift that stirs your heart with hope and confidence and joy. But that union, that bond between you and the living God, is for your future.

On the Last Day, when time ceases, when the end of all things comes to be, you will be judged righteous. You will stand before the throne of the King of all creation and you will be judged righteous. That is your future. You will be judged righteous because the Lord of Life entered time and lived for you. Lived! God lived on this planet for you. God so loved the people He created, God is so invested in you, so intent on keeping you as His own, that He sent His Son into our flesh. That is the movement that invades time. That is the linchpin for your future. God and man, forged into one person in order for you to be judged righteous and live in heaven. Jesus had a body, just like you, yet He was without sin. So that He could live for you, so that He could live righteously, God became man; to give you a hope and a future. He was perfect. He was holy and good and devout and just and humble and obedient and faithful – He is divine glory and divine righteousness and He lived for you. All that is in His account is credited to you.

Do you know why? Because *that* is what God planned. Because you are saved by grace. Because you believe that Jesus died for you and for His sake God forgives you all your sins. You will be judged righteous because Christ is nothing but righteous and you are in Him. Time is moving forward to that day when we will all stand before Him. Time is your ally. We don't want to go backwards – we go forward. Now, how many of you have regrets? How many of you have behaved poorly? How many of you have the stain of unrighteousness in your memory? I would very much like to go back and tidy up my mistakes. I would very much like to go back and undo the horrible things I have done. Selfishness; we have all hurt others. We have all left permanent marks on people that are to our shame. You don't deserve to be called righteous; that is true. Jesus said this, see if what He said applies to you: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31).

Christ lived for sinners. Christ makes a future for sinners. Christ's blood forgives sinners. Christ loves sinners, died for sinners, rose again for sinners. There are nothing but sinners in this holy house, in this town, this nation, this world. Time will bring you to your end. Who will be there to greet you? There's a marvelous painting at the door to the church. It is a memorial to Jim Wood. It is a portrait of heaven – Christ embracing one who has died in the faith and come home. Kathy Beliew kept this painting at her side as she was dying of pancreatic cancer. She filled her eyes with the image and her heart with her future. God is bringing us all home. Time is His tool. He has filled time with the work of His Son. In time you have heard of Christ's person, His work, His love, His cross, and His empty tomb. In time you been washed in holy baptism and Christ's blood turned the filthy rags of your iniquity into the royal garment of His righteousness. Your future is so marvelously secure. Christ is there, already, with His wounds, with His grace. He is present, now, in your future and has prepared a place for you. That is what His conception and birth mean. When you celebrate Christmas in a week's time you are celebrating so much more than one day's drama. You are celebrating love and grace and life and heaven and sacrifice and forgiveness and everything that elevates the human spirit. You have such a future! When God was made man, your future was nestled in Mary's womb. When

Christ first revealed His sacred face, your future was nestled in the manger. Time will ultimately bring you to Him fully. Time will bring you to the Last Day; it draws ever closer and that is to be celebrated.