



A *Christian Century* selection of articles
on this week's readings

December 2

First Sunday of Advent, Year C

Let the apocalyptic be what it is

Luke 21:25–36

How do you preach apocalyptic passages in Christian Testament literature? Well, one answer is don't. But since these texts can't be avoided, try this: treat them like the poetry they are.

We don't attend poetry readings to demand literalist interpretations of presented works. We listen with our ears and our bodies and our memories and our hopes as words wash over us. Sometimes connections are made, and authorial creativity is furthered in the hearer. Some images dredge up deep, unprocessed pain. Some turns of



This week's texts & themes in our library

Jeremiah 33:14–16

[Leonard Beechy](#): "A prophet is one who knows what time it is. Jeremiah knew that it was evening."

phrase delight us and remind us of the unrestrained joy that is often ours as human beings dwelling upon this good earth.

We let poetry be. We let poetry do.

Preaching from apocalyptic texts can be aided by such a method. Let the apocalyptic be what it is. Don't tamp down its hyperbole. Don't run from its fanciful and frightful elements. There is much of the fanciful and the frightful in the contemporary moment. People are equipped to deal with this rhetorical reality. Trust your hearers. Trust the Spirit.

Let apocalyptic do what it does. Let it challenge reason. Let it midwife questions of what is possible and what is impossible. Let it escort us to that lovely, liminal space where prose bows in humble adoration of the poetic.

Billy Collins, poet laureate of the United States from 2001 to 2003, deserves an endowed chair in homiletics and hermeneutics for his poem "Introduction to Poetry." The speaker describes ways he asks students to consider a poem—as a beehive to listen to, as water to ski across, as a dark room in which to feel around for a light switch. "But all they want to do," writes Collins, "is

[Joanna Adams](#): "I don't know how Jeremiah could see anything hopeful. Yet he was sustained by his conviction that the outcome of history was in the hands of God."

[Herbert O'Driscoll](#): "Jeremiah lives in a society that responds to his efforts with rejection. Yet even as he paces the courtyard in which he is confined, he envisages his society transformed."

Psalm 25:1–10

[Carol Zaleski](#): "In the Bible, the ambiguity of shame is unmistakable. Consider Psalm 25: Don't let my enemies destroy my reputation, and while you are at it, scatter them in shame."

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

[John C. Morris](#): "When I preach about the second coming, I find most listeners experience a case of MEGO (My Eyes Glaze Over)."

tie the poem to a chair with rope /
and torture a confession out of it.”

Let’s not torture a confession from
the sun, moon, stars, and earth in
Luke 21. Let the sea roar. Let the
earth shake. Let the image of the
coming Human One strengthen
belief at a time of fainting hearts and
equivocating faith. Listen to 1,000
sprouting fig trees declare that
God’s coming is as reliable as spring
yielding to summer.

Don’t tie this strange, beautiful,
apocalyptic imagery to a chair with
the frayed rope of explanation. Let it
be. Let it do.

Poetry still works.

- *William H. Lamar IV*

Lamar's Living by the Word column

On this first Sunday of Advent,
amid the ugliness and the
beauty of our contemporary
moment, God shows up. We
can’t do anything to make this
happen. Our technology, our
liturgies, our preachments, and
our books can’t seduce God
into appearing. God shows up
because God wills it to be so...

[Read more](#)

Luke 21:25–36

[Cornelius Plantinga Jr.](#): "Watch!
says Jesus. Be alert! His return
isn’t a fireworks display. His
return is the coming of the
kingdom of God."

[T. Denise Anderson](#): "Jesus
describes the widow’s offering
in terms of the disparity within
the cultural system. Then he
turns his attention to the
system itself."

[Ragan Sutterfield](#): "Like the
first hearers of Luke, we are in
a time of crisis and upheaval
brought on by hubris."

Advent 1: Apocalypse

[Carl Braaten considers “three
unsatisfactory approaches to
the ‘last things’”](#): as travelogue,
metaphor, and social
commentary.

Writing at the turn of the
millennium, [Carol Zaleski looks
at Christian timekeeping as a
pilgrimage through history.](#)

[Katherine Willis Pershey](#)
[confesses her hesitation to say](#)
[“come quickly, Lord Jesus.”](#)

She writes: “I long for God to make things right, but I’m in no rush.”

The first candle: Hope

[Charles Pinches](#) [argues that](#)
[hope is what gives us a history:](#)

“It accompanies us on the journey of our lives. It connects our past with our future.”

[Miroslav Volf](#) [commends](#)
[Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope*](#). “Hope is not based on the possibilities of the situation,” writes Volf. “Hope is grounded in the faithfulness of God.”

[Carol Zaleski](#) [explores](#)
[“dispositional hope,”](#) which
“can be nurtured and trained. Prayer, suffering, service, remembrance of the dead—all these are schools for the practice of hope.”

[Kyle Rader](#) [reviews Miguel De La Torre](#), who “argues that most of what is presented as hope in our culture has little to

hope in our culture has little to do with Jesus Christ. It derives instead from Eurocentric ideologies that present the victims of history as necessary casualties.”

Articles for the Advent season

[Stephanie Paulsell on keeping watch in the Trump era](#): “Advent trains us to keep our eyes on the horizon and let what we see in the distance shape how we respond to what we see up close.”

[Barbara Brown Taylor reconsiders Advent darkness](#): “We begin our year when the days are getting darker, not lighter. We count sunset as the beginning of a new day.”

[Kate Bowler on Advent after Ferguson](#): “People are hungry for the world turned upside-down... Advent is preparation for the great inversion.”

[Heidi Neumark attends a baptism party](#) for a one-year-old with an uncle in jail, another in a gang, and a grandmother who died of AIDS. “Every valley shall be exalted,” she reads, asking, “When will this be?”

[Alexa Smith reports on Advent in Lebanon](#). “Here Christians are waiting to see concrete acts of God within history,” she writes in 2006, “even though they have little evidence that deliverance is at hand.”

[Celeste Kennel-Shank kisses Advent purity goodbye](#): “Last year something began to shift. It began when I walked into the intensive care unit the week after Thanksgiving.”
