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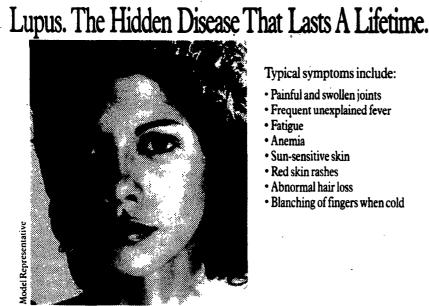
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Columnists

Prepare for Christ's second coming

Sunday's readings: (R3) Luke 21:25-28, 34-36; (R1) Jeremiah 33:14-16; (R2) 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2.

Advent is a time when the Church focuses on the Lord's "coming" - His past, present and future coming.

His first coming 2000 years ago stressed the fact that Christianity is founded on historical events, that it is not a philosophical theory. His second coming at the end of time tells us history is linear and not cyclic; that is, we are not going around in circles, that there is purpose to life - a goal!

The in-between time, the present, is taken up with His coming in mystery on our altars. The past deals with the Christ of history; the future with the Christ of majesty. But the present deals with the Christ of mystery who prepares us for the Christ of majesty at the end of the world.

Four persons dominate the Advent season: David, Isaiah, John the Baptizer and Mary.

Each Sunday of Advent has a general theme, deriving mainly from the Gospel. The first Sunday deals with the second coming of the Lord; the second and third Sundays, with John the Baptizer; and the fourth, with Mary.

Whenever we prepare for a trip, we always start at the end. Where we are going will determine what we take with us on the trip. A trip to Alaska will demand much different gear than a trip to Hawaii. And though our destination is the first thing thought about in a trip, it is the last thing arrived at.

So the Church on the First Sunday of Advent begins at the end: with the second coming of the Lord. Signs, affecting the earth and the heavens, will precede that coming. The world will end, and people will be frightened. But the point of Luke's narration is that the followers of Christ should not be frightened. "Stand straight, raise your heads."

When Lawrence Talbot left Australia for America years ago he said to his mother, "Mother, I will come back to see you." For years she waited. Should anyone have asked her what she was waiting for, she would have answered, "for my son to come back from America?"

Suppose someone said to Mrs. Talbot, "Surely you don't think he'll come back, actually and in person?" She would have answered, "He most certainly will. That's the way he is coming?

Suppose that someone persisted and said, "You've gotten letters and gifts from your boy

Giving thanks in the wilderness

By Cindy Bassett Moses looked back at the Egyptian city of Ramses sprawling in the distance. It was an impressive sight — a monument perhaps to the Hebrews who had fashioned it brick by brick during their years of bondage to Pharaoh.

As Moses turned his gaze to the small city of people camped before him now in the wilderness, he sighed heavily. They were certain to face many hardships in this desert, but anything would be superior to being a slave back in Egypt.

"Don't look back too long, brother," Aaron commented as he joined Moses. "You may suffer the same fate as Lot's wife"

"There's no chance of that," Moses chuck-



in America. That's what he meant. He's coming in all those things."

Mrs. Talbot would have answered, "Indeed not. That isn't what he meant at all. He said he would come back?"

Years later, Talbot did come back. He crossed the ocean, returned to Australia, and walked down the gangplank to his waiting mother. Embracing her warmly, he said, "Mother, here I am!"

Who can express the joy of that mother in meeting her son again? Similarly, the second coming of the Lord is a reality; it will happen most certainly. But for those who love Christ and follow him, it will be a moment not of fright, but of rapturous joy!

Faithful Christians are not to worry, but to be on guard at all times, to be Argus-eyed, extraordinarily watchful, and to pray constantly.

If Christ should come next Sunday, And it may be that He will, Would the thing that I'll be doing Set the Master's heart athrill?

If the Christ should come next Sunday Would He find me loyal, true, In my place with my influence Doing what He'd have me do?

If the Christ should come next Sunday, Let's suppose He came at ten, Would He hear me answer "present" In the class I should attend?

If the Christ should come next Sunday, If He came just at eleven, Would He find me there at holy Mass, Singing praises as in heaven?

So, the real question is not, "When will the world end?" The real question is, "When will we begin to follow Christ more nearly?" Advent is an invitation. Decision is not looking at two alternatives and picking one; it is an assent to an invitation, to make a relationship with Christ final.

The Bible



Aaron had gone. The Egyptians had mistreated the Hebrews for more than four hundred years. Many of his own relatives had died in bondage to Pharaoh without ever seeing the Promised Land. To kill these few Egyptians would help to bind up the wounds.

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Over 500,000 people in the United States have Lupus, and 50,000 new cases are diagnosed each year. More people are affected by Lupus than by leukemia, cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy or AIDS. Men and women of any age can develop Lupus, but it most frequently strikes women of childbearing age.

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led. "Lot's wife wanted to go back to her former life. Only a fool would contemplate living back in Egypt under Pharaoh's thumb. Besides, we have God's promise of a new homeland to sustain us and move us forward."

"You're right, Moses," Aaron agreed, "but we have someone besides our own people here in the wilderness?"

"Oh?" Moses queried.

"It seems that some of the Egyptians have come along with us and are camped here," Aaron said.

"Well, what are their intentions?" Moses frowned. "Has Pharaoh planted them in our midst as spies? I thought we were finally free of his cruelty."

"Moses, calm yourself. It is not what you think at all," Aaron said. "These Egyptians have decided to worship our God. They intend to live with us in peace"

"What's the problem then?" Moses asked.

"Our own people feel it will put spirit into our long journey ahead if these Egyptians are made an example of. They want to give these misfits a fitting end and I think their death is justified," Aaron replied.

"Aaron, go back and calm these hot-heads down before they do something foolish! Until you hear from me, you are to do nothing," Moses advised.

Moses prayed to God for a long time after

Everyone waited with anticipation as Moses came forward to speak. Most felt certain of what his decision would be.

"What return shall we make to the Lord for all he has given us?" Moses began. "We stand here today as free people because of his goodness to us. All of us are witnesses to the great miracles God worked for our own.

"These foreigners who are camped here with us are not our enemies. They have come with us because they want to leave their false gods behind and worship the one true God. Are we to take away the same freedom from them which we waited so long for? And so, I ask each of you to show your gratitude to God by welcoming them to our humble meal here in the wilderness?"

On their very first night of freedom, the Hebrews gathered together with the Egyptians to share the bread which had been baked from the yeastless dough. This was the only provision which they had taken when they left Egypt in great haste after living in slavery for 430 years. Together they bowed their heads in thanksgiving and celebrated their freedom.

Scripture reference: Exodus, Chapter 12:37-42.

Meditation: Dear Jesus, help us to give thanks to you in ways that will truly honor your name.

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