

Maranatha (1 Corinthians 16.22)

Maranatha. That strange word comes at the end of 1 Corinthians. It's two words. *Mara* means 'lord'. (You already know the feminine of *mara*: it's *martha*, 'lady'). *Atha* means 'he came'. The two words together become *maranatha*, and it can mean either 'The Lord has come', or 'Our Lord, come'.

Maranatha is a good word for Advent Sunday, because with its two meanings we can look back with thanks at Christ's *first* Advent: 'the Lord has come'. God came to this dark world in the Babe of Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. But we also look forward to Christ's *second* Coming when he will come again finally to destroy sin and death. 'Our Lord, come'

'O come, O come, Immanuel'. For generations the Jews of the OT longed for better days, for a way to live life. We read *Isaiah 2* which gives God's promise that the day will come when nations will beat their swords into ploughshares, and not learn war anymore. Don't we all long for that day? Alice Newlyn read in *Isaiah 11* God's vision of that coming day when there will be such peace and trust that even a wolf will dwell with the lamb. As we look at the never-ending war in Afghanistan, the continuing violence in Iraq, the incurable hatred between Palestinian and Israeli in Israel, the recent murderous destruction in Bombay, aren't we grateful for God's promise that one day all that will come to an end?

All those longings for a better future are expressed in the OT hope that one day God's specially anointed Messiah will come and set up a better kingdom, God's way of doing things.

Jesus, born of a virgin in Bethlehem is that Messiah. He is Immanuel, God-with-us. *Maranatha*: 'the Lord *has* come'.

When he was among us he shewed his authority over illness, over sin, even over death. We have seen his glory, and as we struggle in this sick world of violence, dishonesty, selfishness and greed, we long for him to come again to establish *fully* and permanently his authority over this world presently under Satan's rule. *Maranatha*, Lord, quickly come.

Believers in the OT looked at the sadness of the world, the wars, the selfishness, the corruption, and they cried out, 'How long, O Lord? How long?' How long do we have to put up with all this? How long do we have to wait for you, Lord, to come and wipe out the bullies, swaggerers, liars, and oppressors? Come, Lord, quickly come! *Maranatha*!

How many more Baby Ps have to be tortured to death? How many more tourists in Indian hotels have to be blown up and injured? How many more wives have to be battered by their husbands? How many more parents have to grieve over their children killed by drugs? How long, O Lord? How long do we have to put up with people in politics, business, personal relationships getting away with their lies and deception?

The choir sang a German chorale whose words you *might* have thought were a bit gloomy:

O quickly come, dread Judge of all,
For, awful though thine advent be,
All shadows from the truth will fall,
And falsehood die, in sight of thee.

The Lord Jesus *will* come again to earth as Judge, and for those who reject God's rule, it will indeed be awful, for he will judge them. But I *long* for that day, when finally all

lies and deceit will be done away. *Maranatha!* Come, Lord, quickly come! When he comes, all sin will be done away, Satan will finally be destroyed as he is cast into the lake.

What this is telling us is that what we have to live through at the moment will one day come to an end. The lies will stop, the Baby Ps will finally be safe, the drug-dealers will be history, and the terrorists who curse us and plot our destruction will be no more.

Who would not want that? Who would not want to fall on their knees and earnestly pray from the bottom of their hearts, *Maranatha,* Come, Lord, quickly come!

Let the churches rediscover this prayer. Let us begin to pray for the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for it is a message of deep hope that God has *not* abandoned us; that the rottenness, sadness and cruelty we see around us is *not* all that God intends for us; that he has a wonderful future planned for us which he will bring about when our Lord returns. One day he will come, as 1 *Thess* 5 reminds us, like a thief in the night. So, like the 5 wise virgins, we should be alert and watchful for him. But when he comes, satan's rule here will be destroyed, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things will have passed away. When he comes, he will wipe away all tears. It's a great future. Today as we thank God for Christ's first Advent, we look forward with joy to his Second Advent.

Let us pray, then, for better days than these, for God has promised us a better future in Christ. 'Thy kingdom come on earth as already in heaven.' *Maranatha!* 'O Lord, come!'