

The day before terrorists attacked New York and Washington on 9/11, a fifth grader in a Dallas suburb told the director of elementary education for the school district, "Tomorrow, World War III will begin. It will begin in the United States."

The child then missed the next two days of school. The statements were passed along to the FBI, but the director didn't know whether the agency had acted on the tip. An FBI spokesman couldn't be reached for comment. "It's one of those things I sincerely want to believe was coincidental," said the director.

What if I told you that someone made an amazingly accurate prediction of a future event—one that was substantiated by three different gospel writers and later confirmed by non-believing historians? You'd probably believe me, because the prediction wasn't made by a fifth grader; it was made by Jesus.

He first predicted the Temple would fall and be destroyed. This prediction did occur in the year 70 A.D. In today's gospel he then goes on to tell us what the end of the world will be like when it happens.

The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. All of this speaks to some kind of violent change in the natural order. We will experience "unnatural disasters."

Jesus also says his return will be marked by dismay, perplexity, and fear among the nations. In other words, there will be widespread panic throughout the earth. Have you seen thousands of people panic at once? Imagine 5 or 6 billion people in a state of panic!

He then goes on to tell us that we will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

How different this Second Coming will be from his first! He won't come as meek and lowly, but with power and glory. He won't come riding on a donkey, but on a cloud. He won't come bearing a cross, but a sword.

+Frederick Buechner, an American writer and theologian, can offer us a bit of comfort: "The judge will be Christ; the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully."

These words of Jesus about the end of the world are a jarring a jarring way with which to start off Advent. I mean, isn't Advent supposed to be a quiet, gentle time? Well, we can say that the Lord is not speaking only about the end of the world. Jesus is also describing a new beginning.

The Season of Advent is like the ancient Roman god, Janus, for whom the month of January is named. Janus is depicted in art as having two faces. One face looks backward into the past; the other looks forward into the future.

During Advent, we look backward into the past to the First Coming of Jesus. It also looks forward into the future to his Second Coming. As of now, we stand at the midpoint between these two great moments in our history.

Advent is a new beginning, a chance for a fresh start for the soul and spirit. It is time to evaluate what is really important and lasting in our passing lives.

+I know of a gift you could give to your loved one for Advent! It is called Tikker - a wristwatch that counts down your life so you can make every second count. It allows you to watch as a dot-matrix screen displays the seconds you have left on earth as they disappear down a black hole.

Tikker uses a process like the one used by the federal government to figure a person's life expectancy and then converts that into a countdown of the years, months, days, minutes, and seconds you have left on this earth. The effect is sobering, a sort of incessant grim reaper reminding you that time is running out.

Get this, the inventor Fredrik Colting, was a former grave digger. He calls it "the happiness watch." It's his belief that watching your life slip away will remind you to savor life while you have it. I'm not sure I would put that under the Christmas tree, but it would be a bold reminder!

+Some time ago there was a story in the news about a house that burned down, killing one of the younger children. What made the story even more tragic was that the father, the house's owner, had been planning for two weeks to install a smoke alarm, but did not. The father told reporters that it was something that he kept putting off— because he was too busy with other things.

That tragic story hits close to home with all of us because it could have happened to any one of us.

There are so many things that we want to do, but we keep putting them off— for one reason or another. There are mothers who want to get to know their daughters better; or fathers who want to get to know their sons better, but they keep putting it off. The song, "A Cats in a Cradle" come to mind! (I may be dating myself).

There are husbands and wives who want to deepen their relationship with each other but keep putting it off— for some reason or other. I think there's a human tendency in all of us to put things off.

But a closer look shows that maybe that's not the whole story or a way of seeing it. Perhaps our problem isn't that of putting things off... Rather, it's that of just missing opportunities. "Why did I get so angry and scream at my son or daughter? I could have been kinder, and gentler in saying "No" or, "Why didn't I offer to do the dishes when I know Mom felt so lousy?"

Advent is the time to make up all those past opportunities for doing good.

Most importantly, in this in-between time, don't miss your opportunity to be closer to Christ.

Each day, he is there for us, but for how many more times?

How many more opportunities? Best not put that off to long! Get that watch if you need to!