

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Introduction]**

Jesus is always shifting things into reverse. He’s the backwards-moving God. He takes things the way *they are* and makes them the way *they should be* by transforming them into *what was*.

He is the Second Adam, come to make you like the first man, only better.

He creates the heavenly Jerusalem for you, a Jerusalem that is like the Garden of Eden, only better.

He is the Sacrifice to end all sacrifices, like the Passover lamb, only better.

In our reading, Isaiah preaches from his prophetic pulpit. His Spirit-filled eye sees a mountain jacked up so high it makes Everest a mere pip-squeak peak. Every other mountain and hill must salute its elevation.

Rivers of nations stream upward to this heaven-scraping peak.

Yes, rivers in reverse. Take that, Mr. Newton. No gravitational pull can put the brakes on this motion. Splishing and splashing skyward, they flow up to the peak.

There, swords crafted to open flesh are hammered into plowshares that open the earth for seed, food, and life. Warriors become farmers. Spears, pruning hooks.

Everything is running in reverse. He “re-genesises” the world. Nothing stays the same, for the Creator has come in the flesh to make all things new, all things new for you.

**[3...]**

So it is, in Advent. He comes. He “advents” to make all things dead alive again. And the world to which he comes stands in dire need of his arrival. It is, in fact, dead on his arrival.

An ugly place it is, for we are an ugly race. Oh, sure, we've tried to put makeup over it, but such vanity is truly in vain. The face of the world is pockmarked with graves. We can't perfume away the stench of death that wafts through our air. When you were born, you took your first tottering step toward the edge of your tomb.

Most hours of most days we live in a delusional world of make-believe; we pretend it isn't so. We pretend to act from pure motives . . . and pure they are—purely self-serving or, at best, a motley mixture of good, bad, and worse.

We pretend honesty, but in truth we twist our stories, exaggerate our innocence, and impute false motives to others. We even begin to believe the lies—we repeat them so often. Our ears grin at the gossip whispered into them. Our adulterous hearts have a triple-X rating. Why, we make it easy on the devils. No demonic student ever falls below an A+ in his class on Temptation.

It does no good to deny this. That would be like a bum three sheets to the wind slurring, and hiccupping while he argues with you that he isn't drunk.

It does no good to deny it, but to confess it, to say what is true about yourself—as scary as that is—that does good. It does the good of repentance, the good of living up to the death within us, and finding—in another's death—life everlasting.

[2...]

Because it is for you, the dead, that Jesus lived his life. Advent is his present to you, wrapped in the living colors of his skin, flesh, bones, and blood.

He comes running to those who cannot even begin to crawl to him.

He comes to you and puts everything bad about you in reverse: from guilt to forgiveness, from lies to truth, from death and shame to life in his name.

He's the backwards God, and he's ready, willing, and able to take you back to a place you've never been before—the place of perfection and innocence. In fact, he's already accomplished it. It's a done deal, a deal done for you.

Isaiah prophesied, “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains” (v 2 ESV).

This is God's turf, the place where he is found, this peak of peaks. It is the mountain called Zion, the city of the living God. It is the mountain named the Church. For when the Creator is lifted up to hang bleeding and dying between heaven and earth, there he lifted up this one, holy, Christian, and apostolic mountain.

A new and better Zion was formed from the raw materials of his flesh and blood. By his living, bleeding, rising, and ascending, he crafted the high hill where death and sin are no more.

[I...]

Of this Zion you are a citizen. On this mountain is your home. Adam and Eve were booted out of Paradise, but you are pulled back in by the new Adam, back up to the Eden that has now become one with Zion. Eden Zion, Zion Eden—all are one in Christ Jesus. Here he is. And there you are.

Near Zion of old was the temple where God dwelt amidst his children. But on this new Zion there is no temple of wood and stone, but a temple of skin, flesh, bones, and blood. For the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. Our temple is not a building, but the babe Jesus, rooting for his mother's milk.

Into that temple you have entered, washed there by the baptismal stream. All the nations flow up to this mountain, says Isaiah, for they are carried there on the river of salvation.

Through the door of the font you flowed into his flesh. And in that body of the Son of God you are cleansed. Here is not make-believe but reality. Here is not ugliness but beauty.

All the hideousness of your sin vanishes; you are lovely in the eyes of the Father. Gone are lies and here is truth—the truth that God's heart is fixed on you, that he wants you, that you are the apple of his eye.

Until the last trumpet sounds, men with blood in their eyes will haunt this world. Bombs will explode; bullets will penetrate; swords will slash. Peace will remain the unattainable ideal.

But there is a peace in this world but not of this world—the peace of Zion. There is reconciliation between God and man. There is the peace that passes *understanding* because it *stands under* the banner of the crucifix. Within the flesh of God's Son the conflict ceases.

God's fiery wrath is doused by holy blood. God is one with man; Jew is one with Gentile; all are unified in Christ.

**[Conclusion]**

Christ Jesus Has Shifted Everything into Reverse.

The world needed a reversal, a new Eden, and so do you. Therefore, Jesus came to take you back to a place you've never been: a new Zion. This Jesus, the new Adam, pulled you back to that new Zion, which is the new Eden.

Paradise is regained. We who lived in the lowlands of darkness and the dunghills of death ascend the mountain to walk in the light of the Lord. Our sin is traded in for righteousness. Our guilt is replaced by peace of heart. Our mortality is swallowed up by immortality.

For all this Jesus came. All this he did because he wanted you. And now he has you. Never, ever will he let you go.

Welcome to the mountain called Zion, the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

Christ Jesus Has Shifted Everything into Reverse. Amen.

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“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)

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