

# Coming in clouds



*Matthew 24:15-35; Mark  
13:14-37; Luke 21:20-36*

*Year B Advent 1 ; Year C  
Advent 1*

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## Parts by scene

■ = large part   ▲ = medium sized part   ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5
■	<b>Judas</b> - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
▲	<b>James</b> - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲				
▲	<b>John</b> - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲				
●	<b>Peter</b> - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room		▲			
●	<b>Nathanael</b> - Phillip's crass bully of an older brother, who joins Jesus in search of redemption and nobler life		●			
▲	<b>Matthew</b> - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples			▲		
●	<b>Phillip</b> - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence			●		
▲	<b>Thomas</b> - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts				▲	
●	<b>Mary Magdalene</b> - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past				▲	
▲	<b>Joanna</b> - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus					▲

## Scene 1

James , John , Judas

*{Judas discusses Jesus' latest sermon with John and James.}*

**Judas** *[derisively]* "The Son of Man will come in clouds with great power and glory!" In the clouds! It must be clear to you that the rabbi's gone off the deep end.

**James** You watch your mouth! Maybe you've lost your faith, but we're standing true. If anyone's gone off the deep end, it's you!

**John** *[in a conciliatory tone]* I've also been concerned about some of the things he's said and done since we entered Jerusalem, but we have to believe that he knows what he's doing.

**Judas** "Have to" believe? Why do we "have to" believe? Because it would hurt our pride to admit we made a mistake? Because we're so stubborn that we refuse to change directions even when we see the road we're on leads over a cliff?

**James** Because we're faithful! Because we don't wimp out at the first sign of trouble.

**John** Maybe you could talk to the rabbi. Express your concerns.

**Judas** When has that ever worked? Even in good times? You know what he'll say in answer to any question we ask him? "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." Or "the Son of Man will come in the clouds with power and glory." Or some other totally irrelevant fantasy.

**James** *[apoplectic]* Fantasy??? John, did you hear that? It's...it's blasphemy!

**Judas** John, you must see it yourself! He's disengaged - from us, and maybe from reality. We're all in grave danger.

**John** *[trying to keep the peace by maintaining a calm, thoughtful tone]* Sometimes, I think he must get impatient with us, with our questions and misunderstandings, and he wants to jump straight to the valuable teaching he has to give. He skips the questions we ask in order to answer far more important questions.

**Judas** *[dryly]* That's a very - charitable interpretation.

**James** *[belligerently]* Charity??? You'd better hope for some charity yourself!

**John** Take it easy, James. He means well.

**James** *[angrily]* Does he? Are we sure? He's not one of *us*, you know. He didn't get in on the ground floor like we did. But he waltzes in after *his*

rabbi is killed and suddenly, he's Mr. Organizer and the Treasurer and thinks he's in the inner circle. And now he's talking about bailing! Well, go right ahead! It'll be a good riddance.

**Judas** *[in a quiet voice after a pause]* I wish I could. But as you said, I've involved myself to maybe an undue degree in the fate of the rabbi. And now, if he does something crazy that brings the Romans down upon the nation, I'll have more blood on my hands than most.

## Scene 2

Judas , Nathanael , Peter

*{Judas discusses Jesus' latest sermon with Peter and Nathanael.}*

**Judas** But don't you see? He's given up. He's *predicting* that the nation is going to be destroyed!

**Peter** No way!

**Judas** He said that people would have to flee Judea, and warned them not to even try going back to their homes for their things. He said that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies!

**Nathanael** So? He didn't say we wouldn't *defeat* those armies.

**Peter** Or that the people who run away won't be able to come back.

**Judas** He said a "desolating abomination" would occur in the Temple. Does that sound optimistic to you?

**Peter** To tell you the truth, I didn't even know what that meant, and I was afraid to ask! Everybody else seemed to be like, "Oh, yeah, the desolating abomination," but I never heard of it before. What is it?

**Judas** Uh...I'm not exactly sure, to be honest, but it can't be good, right? It can't be a sign that we're somehow going to win a big war.

**Nathanael** Isn't it from one of the Prophets?

**Judas** What?

**Nathanael** The abomination thing. I thought I heard Matthew say something about...oh, who was it?...Daniel! About Daniel predicting it.

**Peter** No kidding? No wonder I didn't get it. I don't know a thing about the Prophets.

**Judas** *[half to himself]* He was referencing a prophecy?

**Peter** Anyway, you shouldn't worry so much. He said that we'd win in the end, didn't he?

**Nathanael** Yeah, he said in the end, we would look up to see our redemption coming.

**Judas** *[skeptically]* Right. Him, coming in the clouds to rescue us.

**Peter** Right! So cheer up! We can't lose!

### Scene 3

Judas , Matthew , Phillip

*{Judas discusses Jesus' latest sermon with Matthew and Phillip.}*

**Judas** *[to Matthew]* So I'm told that the "desolating abomination" that the rabbi talked about this morning was a reference to a scripture.

**Matthew** Indeed it was.

**Judas** Tell me about it. What's the context?

**Matthew** Well, Daniel was given a prophecy about two kings that would battle for control of Judea, a "King of the South" and a "King of the North". The King of the North will win out, and as part of his oppression of the nation, will put a halt to the Temple sacrifices and then place a desolating abomination in the Temple itself! Though the prophecy doesn't say what it will be.

**Phillip** Wait a minute. "Place" an abomination in the Temple? It's an object or something like that and not something that happens?

**Matthew** Yeah, and that's what the master said, too. He said, "When you see *standing* in the holy place..."

**Phillip** Oh, I know! It could be like a statue of Caesar, right?

**Matthew** *[grimly]* That's exactly the kind of thing the Romans would do!

**Judas** *[half to himself]* Something sacrilegious being placed in the Temple...why does that ring a bell? *[suddenly out loud]* Of course! It's happened before. It's happened *already!*

**Phillip** What on earth are you talking about?

**Judas** *[triumphantly]* History! Political history! The "King of the South": the Ptolemies. The "King of the North": the Seleucids.

**Phillip** The who and the what?

**Judas** They were two empires that vied for control of this region a couple of hundred years ago. And just like Daniel said, the northern side prevailed, and one of their kings, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, set up an altar to Zeus in the Temple, and later sacrificed a pig there, too. A desolating abomination!

**Matthew** *[calmly]* Yes, I know all about that. What's the big deal?

**Judas** *[incredulously]* The "big deal" is that the rabbi is citing a prophecy that's already been fulfilled!

**Matthew** So?

**Judas** What do you mean, "so"? You don't see this as a problem? He's saying that this desolating abomination is going to happen in the future - within one generation, in fact, if I recall correctly - but it's already happened!

**Phillip** Why couldn't it happen again?

**Judas** *[at a peak of frustration]* Of course it could, but that's not the point! The point is that he's using scripture incorrectly.

**Matthew** Not at all. Many prophecies have multiple fulfillments.

**Judas** *[almost in despair]* I see. So if you invoke a prophecy that's already been fulfilled, that just means it's going to be fulfilled again. And what if it's not fulfilled?

**Phillip** *[earnestly]* Maybe you just have to wait a little longer.

**Judas** *[sarcastically]* Well, there's no arguing with *that!*

#### Scene 4

Judas , Mary , Thomas

*{Judas discusses Jesus' latest sermon with Thomas and Mary.}*

- Judas** Okay, Thomas, you're my last hope. Please tell me you're not buying what the rabbi's been saying.
- Thomas** Actually, I've been finding it very moving: The gathering Darkness, the nation besieged by overwhelming forces, false messiahs everywhere you look, and to top it off, some act or event so horrible it renders the people desolate. But then, descending in clouds of glory, the Savior of the Righteous, come to rescue his people!
- Mary** *[breathlessly]* Amen!
- Judas** But you don't seriously believe it, do you?
- Mary** I do!
- Judas** But what about you, Thomas? I didn't think you wanted to believe in anything.
- Thomas** A common misconception! I don't set out to disbelieve; I *want* to believe! I just need proof that what I'm asked to believe in is true.
- Judas** But there's no proof at all that anything the rabbi's been saying is true.
- Thomas** And no proof it isn't. And so, on all these matters, I'm agnostic.
- Mary** *[in a small voice]* It's not true.
- Thomas** *[surprised she would say anything negative]* Excuse me?
- Mary** *[slightly more firmly]* I'm sorry - but it's not true. You do believe. *[to Judas]* And you do, too!
- Judas** How do you figure that?
- Mary** You're here.
- Thomas** *[suddenly moved almost to tears]* You're right about that. I did make a leap of faith, once in my life, once upon a time. Not about his teachings, but about him, and his followers. You all. I joined the group, I decided to believe in it. And I still do. I'll live with you and die with you.

**Judas**     *[gently]* Mary, it's true I'm here, but at this point, it's not because I believe the rabbi is the messiah any more. It's to keep him from doing harm - to you, to the others, to the nation - if he keeps on going the way he's been.

**Mary**     See? You *do* believe! You care.

**Judas**     All right, I'll grant you that.

**Mary**     Then promise me something. Promise me you won't have anything to do with having the rabbi killed.

**Thomas**   *[shocked]* Mary!

**Judas**     Ah yes. I do remember him talking about that, but as far as I can tell, you're the only member of the group who really heard him. It's really remarkable how people suppressed that. But tell me, if it's fated that he's going to die, then what's the point of asking me not to have anything to do with it? (Not that I would!)

**Mary**     *[pleadingly]* If you would never think of doing anything like that, then it won't hurt to promise me, will it? Please. Please promise me that you won't!

**Judas**     *[gently]* All right, Mary. I promise.

## Scene 5

Joanna , Judas

*{Judas discusses Jesus' latest sermon with Joanna, whom he finds in a distracted state.}*

**Judas**     Are you all right?

**Joanna**    Yeah. Just - tired.

**Judas**     These are tiring times.

**Joanna**    I used to wake every morning with daylight in my heart, looking forward to all the things that awaited me. Now I wake in a vague dread.

**Judas**     Maybe you should return to your old bedroom.

**Joanna**    You mean leave the group? Go back home? No. I'm staying.

**Judas** If it's for Mary, I have a plan. I have some connections that can get her arrested.

**Joanna** What???

**Judas** Hear me out! I can get her arrested so that *you* can then suggest house arrest through the connections I'm sure *you* have, and bring her home with you. She wouldn't spend a day in jail.

**Joanna** [*in confusion*] Okay, but I have no idea why you're proposing this. What does Mary have to do with anything?

**Judas** Chuza told me that's why you were staying in the group.

**Joanna** Oh! You're in communication with Chuza? I just told him that because I didn't think he'd understand the real reason.

**Judas** Ah! Well, that makes more sense to me. I didn't think that could be the reason, but I think I know what the real reason is, and I want to tell you that I understand completely.

**Joanna** [*earnestly*] Do you? If you know the reason I'm staying, I wish you'd let me in on the secret, because I have no idea what it is!

**Judas** [*suddenly unsure of himself*] Then you aren't staying just to make sure the rabbi doesn't do significant damage to the nation if and when he goes down?

**Joanna** No! Well, to be honest, I've thought about the possibility of disaster, more and more since we entered the city, but I'm feeling pretty helpless to do anything about it. So no, that's not why I'm staying.

**Judas** Then why is it? Chuza's desperate with worry over you, you know.

**Joanna** I know, and I don't know how I could ever explain it to him when I can't even explain it to myself. I hope you appreciate how hard this has been for me: I've never *not* known why I did anything! Yet, here I am, clueless but committed.

**Judas** Well, if you ever want out, consider my plan. It would not only get Mary out of harm's way, it could be the excuse you might feel you need to leave yourself: to rescue her.

**Joanna** [*with an appreciative laugh*] Very clever! You're quite the schemer.



**Judas** I just hope my schemes will be sufficient to avert disaster - for all of us.

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*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at  
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