

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Stay Awake

Invitation to Pray

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Song

Wake, O Wake, and Sleep No Longer

Proclaim the Gospel

Matthew 24:37-44

The Return of the Son of Man

Take a few minutes to savor a word, a phrase, a question, or a feeling that rises up in you. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

The other Scripture readings of the day are

Isaiah 2:1-5,

Psalms 122:1-9,

and Romans 13:11-14.

Invitation to Reflect on the Gospel

Have you ever been waiting in a long line wondering what you could be doing, or even worse, should be doing? Just such a dilemma confronted the Church in the first century. Jesus was expected to return in “this generation.” But “that generation” was nearly gone by the time the Gospel of Matthew was being written.

The return of Jesus was still expected, but the time of the return was unknown and becoming increasingly

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unknowable. It was as unknowable as the arrival of a thief or the onslaught of the flood in Noah's day.

What were the early followers of Jesus to do while waiting? Watch! Be alert! Be about the work of the gospel as if the Lord's return were to be any second now. A vigilance of waiting is superseded by a vigilance of acting.

We do not look for Jesus' immediate return with the same apocalyptic intensity of first century Christians. We have come to see over the centuries that God's transformation of humanity and creation is a more evolutionary process. We have come to see that we share this process with God. God will not do it without us. So while we wait, we cannot be idle.

As we begin the liturgical year, we seek to recommit ourselves to be a people who watch as we wait, who stand on tiptoe in expectation of encountering the presence of Jesus who comes ever new into our hearts, our lives, and our world.

Invitation to Group Sharing

1. When have I experienced the coming of Jesus into my life at a totally unexpected hour or place?
2. How does Jesus' coming like a thief in the night challenge my need to be securely in control at all times?
3. How can we foster a sense of confident anticipation of Jesus' return without being either complacent or fearful?

Invitation to Act

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. This should be your primary consideration. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. The following are secondary suggestions:

1. Don't waste this Advent season. Stay awake. Make it a time to focus on Jesus who is always coming, whether we notice or not. Commit to spending ten minutes each day in quiet prayer as a preparation for Jesus' coming.
2. Practice patience in traffic, in line, with family members, in the doctor's office, etc. When circumstances place you in the company of other people, notice them. Give them a smile. Pray for their needs. Extend a courtesy. Be gracious to them as God has been gracious to you.
3. Focus on being truly present to family, friends, or coworkers this week. Share the difference it made with the group next session.

Invitation to Closing Prayer

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for insights gained, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Leader In the night,
All **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Leader In the cold,
All **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Leader As we wait,
All **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Leader As we tire,
All **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Leader Into our hearts,
All **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Leader Into our lives,
All **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Leader Into our world,
All **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Leader This Advent, we pray that we might wait
in joyful hope
for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

All **Amen, amen.**