

St. David's Episcopal Church  
First Sunday of Advent Sermon 2023  
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Happy New Year! It seems a bit early to be wishing you a Happy New Year, but today is the first day of the Liturgical Year. The Church's year begins on the first day of Advent, which is always the fourth Sunday before Christmas. You can tell that we have changed seasons because the linens on the altar and the hanging on the pulpit have changed. It is the season of Advent, a quiet time of reflection and preparation for Christmas and the birth of the Christ Child.

I don't know about you, but Advent for me has rarely been a "quiet time of reflection and preparation." Instead, it is a time when I hustle about doing all the things that NEED to be done to get ready for Christmas.

What about you, are you ready for Christmas? Have you made your advent wreath, bought all your presents, put up the tree, hung the stockings, wrapped the presents, sent out your Christmas cards? Are you ready?

Today is the first day of Advent and since the fourth Sunday of Advent falls on Christmas Eve, that means there are only 3 weeks until Christmas. Every year I know when Christmas is coming yet I find myself at midnight on Christmas Eve madly wrapping presents, hanging stockings and preparing for Christmas day.

I picture the madness and mayhem of many a Christmas Eve at our house when I hear today's Gospel reading and I wonder, will I wait until the last hour to prepare for the Son of Man to come in glory and great power? Unlike Christmas, we don't know when this will be – do we want to be caught unprepared?

If you look in your Bible you will notice that the section we read today from the Book of Mark, Chapter 24 is subtitled, “The Coming of the Son of Man.” It begins in the middle of a story about Jesus and his disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple. Jesus has been answering questions about his prophesy that the Temple would be destroyed, and he is preparing the disciples for the day of his second coming in great power and glory. He tells of signs to look for, false Messiahs, war, famine, earthquakes, great suffering but, in the end, Jesus says no one, not even he, knows the day of the second coming. And he ends by telling the story of a man going on a journey, leaving his servants in charge to do the work they have been assigned and commanding the doorkeeper to keep watch. The servants are cautioned to do what he has asked as one never knows when the master of the house will return, and they would not want to be caught unprepared or asleep on the job.

Over the centuries many people have espoused being able to read the signs and have boldly predicted the day of Christ’s second coming. When I was young, I was frightened by these predictions. I would lie in bed worrying that I wasn’t ready and that I would be separated from my family when the time came. I didn’t know how to prepare for that momentous day, but I knew that I did not want to be caught unaware, unprepared, sleeping when I should have been awake. (Perhaps I took the readings a little too literally because I believed that I needed to stay awake at all times, a task I failed every night.)

Today I can scoff at people who proclaim that they have read the signs and are certain that current events are pointing to the time of Christ’s coming. Who do they think they are that they will be able to pinpoint the hour of the coming of the

Son of Man when we have been told by Christ himself that no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son of God, but only the Father knows when this time will come.

I know that I need not worry about the day when Christ comes again, but instead, I need to spend my energy focusing on preparing my heart, mind and soul to so that I am prepared when that glorious day comes.

Advent is the perfect time to intentionally prepare not only for the birth of the Christ Child, but of the day of the return of the risen Christ – it is the time to get ready for the “Coming of the Son of Man.”

But how does one go about this kind of preparation – for this is not about the hustle and bustle that many of us experience this time of year.

Here at St. David’s, we prepare by adding the spiritual practice of lighting the candles on the Advent Wreath at the beginning of the services in Advent. This pause during our regular worship service is a time to reflect on the coming of Christ and find hope, peace, love and joy in the fire’s glow. You and your family can adopt this spiritual practice at home as a way of slowing down to focus on the real reason for the season. Each week, with the lighting of an additional candle, let the light symbolize the casting away of darkness and putting on the armor of light that we need to rise to the life immortal.

Another opportunity to prepare for the “Coming of the Son of Man” is found in Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth in which he reminds us that we are all given spiritual gifts to be used as we await Christ’s coming. This Advent season, I encourage you to not try to be all things to everyone but focus on using your spiritual gift in service to your church, your neighbors, your family and your

friends. Let your spiritual gift help you to be present for the people that you love, the task at hand, the moment. Your presence will be the greatest present you can give.

Over the next four weeks we will prepare for the “Coming of the Son of Man” as a community of believers. We will pray, sing, read, reflect, worship and pause. Together we will be ready for Christmas and the day when our Lord comes in great power and glory whenever that day may be. Together we will “Keep Awake.”