

11.30.2025 Advent 1

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

“Keep awake, be ready”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

I think God has a sense of humor because Advent comes at the busiest time of the year. Advent comes when we are already stretched to our limits to finish commitments we have made for 2025, promises to our families, church, workplace, clients, and our neighbors. As if honoring our promises to others isn't enough, we pile onto that an insane holiday season of shopping, decorating, partying – it's no wonder that for many of us we can feel blue, even depressed. And to make it worse, we do this to ourselves because nowhere does scripture say that we must prepare for the birth of Christ with an elaborate cultural and material celebration!

If anything, scripture encourages the opposite. Today on the first day of a new church year, all the readings urge us to a way of living that goes in the opposite direction from the world. Isaiah encourages us to a path of peacemaking among the nations and the renunciation of war. Paul encourages us to a path of living decently as people of the light, light shining in the darkness of the world through each of us. Jesus encourages us to a path of readiness for the advent and the coming of Christ. All the readings for the First Sunday of Advent encourage us to awake from our sleepwalking on worldly paths and a preoccupation with self-centered appetites. Advent urges us to awake from our deadening consumerism that seeks to buy happiness. Advent calls us to awake from the paralyzing nationalisms of this age, that instead of advancing peace, seek to profit from both war and peace, only to produce further enmity and division among the nations. Advent calls us to awake from our often-unconscious flirtation with the world's darkness and to live with a renewed sense of faith and hope that Jesus Christ, is with us. He is the light of the world, Emmanuel, God with us.

The first Sunday of Advent is realistic about these end times. Yes, that's right – end times! It's not just the end of the calendar year: Advent is a reminder that we are people both expecting the coming of Christ and we are people who already live in the eternal now of Jesus Christ present in daily life. It's our flirtation with the world that lulls us into sleep, robbing us of readiness each moment to Christ's in-breaking in the everyday of our often weary, jaded, and cynical lives.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to walk with one foot in this world of time-commitments and pressures, and one foot already in the eternity of the Kingdom of God. Sometimes I think that

what delays Christ's coming is not his slowness or inattention to our needs, but our own need of awakening to him. Christ lives raised and present in every moment. Advent reminds us that we are always surrounded by eternity: Jesus Christ, the eternal now, is always near to you.

Jesus' words today, "*Keep awake, be ready,*" are words to live by, not only in Advent, but all day and every day. He is with us, but we must slow down, awake, and listen for him saying, "*Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*" Each day live with expectation; live expecting that he will use you for good.

Amid the holly-jolly-nonsense of our cultural consumer Christmas, there is a lot of darkness and loneliness. Many live alone and forgotten. To live awake to Christ's coming is to be alert that he will use you as light for others in this world. I ask you to think about your Advent and Christmas memories. What memories do you have of being helped by someone or of helping someone during this season? What are your "Advent memories" of Emmanuel, God with you?

This insight into the darkness and loneliness of this season was driven home to me at a very young age when my father, who was a pastor, took a small group of young people from our church on the south side of Chicago to sing carols at the homes of older church members who lived alone. I was much too young to really be included in this group of junior high and high school youth, but I have never forgotten that evening.

We called on several older homebound members, and our last stop was to visit a gentleman whose wife had passed away and who lived alone in one of those brownstone three-story apartment buildings that are everywhere in Chicagoland. It was a cold Chicago winter's night, and he knew we were coming and was expecting us. This was long before cellphones and text messages, and he didn't know at what hour we would come, but he was ready.

After we sang carols, he invited us to sit down in his small apartment and brought out two large plates filled with cookies and a large pot of hot cocoa. I was of a young age when the cookies and cocoa were still a special treat, but as I took my first sip of the cocoa, I could taste that it was burned. In anticipation of our arrival, this gentleman had probably kept the cocoa on the stove warmed by a gas flame. In a quiet voice I complained to my father who told me to drink it anyway for the man had been waiting and had prepared it specially for us.

For years, I have thought about this memory because though we came to sing for him, his readiness for us was his gift to us. To visit someone in their home is to be welcomed into a sacred space, a place where time and eternity meet, a place where Jesus Christ is present even in loneliness. Dare I say it, that was the most memorable cup of cocoa I have ever had because

Christ was present in that cup and in those cookies. If you are awake to him, Christ will come to you when you least expect him. What are your “Advent memories” of Emmanuel, God with you? Though we await his second coming to judge the nations of the world, he is the eternal now, always around you if you but open yourself to him.

During Advent, I encourage you to be ready. Take time for quiet reflection: the Congregational Life Committee has again prepared Advent bags with an Advent devotional book. Make time for prayer: each Wednesday evening during Advent at 7 pm we gather for Midweek Advent Prayer, both in-person and online. Make time to love and serve others: every Thursday our Soup Kitchen welcomes the hungry and homeless into our church. Consider volunteering or donating to it or consider signing up to help with Room in the Inn. In January and February, we will welcome the homeless to stay overnight in our church. Room in the Inn sign up boards are in the Gathering Place.

During Advent, take time to reflect on God’s word, to pray, and to serve others. God will be with you, and Christ will come to you at moments you do not expect, even in hot cocoa.

*Keep awake*, he is coming in power and glory to judge the nations.

*Be ready*, he is already with you and will open your eyes to your neighbor in need.

The time is at hand! Now is the moment to awake! Amen.