

# Holy Eucharist

December 3, 2023

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85887946777?pwd=eig4MEdsMUh6cIV6b2dUblFOQ3I2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 858 8794 6777

Passcode: 782611

## Advent 1B

### Prelude

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a time of waiting. We wait for God to send divine love and light into our dark world. God's light comes through Jesus, who became a human being—incarnate-- just like you and me. He was born to show us the way back to God's divine love and light. We prepare ourselves for that day of delight.

**Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.**



*All stand as they are able*

### Opening Hymn

**Hymnal 57**

*Lo! he comes with clouds descending*

1 Lo! he comes, with clouds de - scend - ing, once for  
2 Ev - ery eye shall now be - hold him, robed in  
4 Yea, a - men! let all a - dore thee, high on  
our sal - va - tion slain; thou - sand thou - sand  
dread - ful ma - jes - ty; those who set at  
thine e - ter - nal throne; Sa - vior, take the  
saints at - tend - ing swell the tri - umph of his  
nought and sold him, pierced, and nailed him to the  
power and glo - ry; claim the king - dom for thine  
train: Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!  
tree, deep - ly wail - ing, deep - ly wail - ing,  
own: Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!



Al - le - lu - ia! Christ the Lord re - turns to reign.  
 deep - ly wail - ing, shall the true Mes - si - ah see.  
 Al - le - lu - ia! Thou shalt reign, and thou a - lone.

*Presider* Blessed are you, holy and living One.  
*People* **You come to your people and set them free.**

*The Presider begins the Collect for Purity*

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid:  
**Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*The following is sung, all standing as they are able*

**Kyrie: Lord, have mercy**

**Hymnal S-91**



Lord, have mer - cy up - on us. Lord, have mer - cy up -



on us. Lord, have mer - cy up - on us. Christ, have mer - cy up -



on us. Christ, have mer - cy up - on us. Christ, have mer - cy up -



on us. Lord, have mer - cy up - on us.



Lord, have mer - cy up - on us. Lord, have mer - cy up - on us.

## Collect of the Day

*Presider*           The Lord be with you.  
*People*             **And also with you.**  
*Presider*           Let us pray.

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.   **Amen.**

*All sit.*

## First Reading

Isaiah 64:1-9

A Reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

<sup>1</sup>O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—  
<sup>2</sup>as when fire kindles brushwood  
and the fire causes water to boil—  
to make your name known to your adversaries,  
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!  
<sup>3</sup>When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.  
<sup>4</sup>From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him.  
<sup>5</sup>You meet those who gladly do right,  
those who remember you in your ways.  
But you were angry, and we sinned;  
because you hid yourself we transgressed.  
<sup>6</sup>We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.  
We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
<sup>7</sup>There is no one who calls on your name,  
or attempts to take hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us,  
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.  
<sup>8</sup>Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.  
<sup>9</sup>Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,  
and do not remember iniquity forever.  
Now consider, we are all your people.

*Reader* The Word of the Lord.  
*People* **Thanks be to God.**

*Remain seated*

**Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18**

*to be prayed responsively, beginning with the men*

- <sup>1</sup>Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; \*  
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
- <sup>2</sup>**In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, \***  
**stir up your strength and come to help us.**
- <sup>3</sup>Restore us, O God of hosts; \*  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- <sup>4</sup>**O LORD God of hosts, \***  
**how long will you be angered**  
**despite the prayers of your people?**
- <sup>5</sup>You have fed them with the bread of tears; \*  
you have given them bowls of tears to drink.
- <sup>6</sup>**You have made us the derision of our neighbors, \***  
**and our enemies laugh us to scorn.**
- <sup>7</sup>Restore us, O God of hosts; \*  
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- <sup>16</sup>**Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, \***  
**the son of man you have made so strong for yourself.**
- <sup>17</sup>And so will we never turn away from you; \*  
give us life, that we may call upon your Name.
- <sup>18</sup>**Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; \***  
**show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.**

**Second Reading**

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

A Reading from Paul's First letter to the Church in Corinth.

<sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
<sup>4</sup>I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup>for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—<sup>6</sup>just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—<sup>7</sup>so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Reader* The Word of the Lord.  
*People* **Thanks be to God.**

*All stand as they are able.*

# Sequence Hymn

*I want to be ready*

LEVAS 7

I want\_ to be read - y, I want\_ to be read - y. —

I want\_ to be read - y\_ To walk in Je - ru - sa - lem just like John. **Fine**

1. John said that Je - ru - sa - lem was four-square,
2. When Pe - ter was preach - ing at Pen - te - cost,

Walk in Je - ru - sa - lem just like John.

1. I hope, good Lord, I'll meet you there,
2. O he was filled with the Ho - ly Ghost,

Walk in Je - ru - sa - lem just like John. O **D.C.**

## Holy Gospel

Mark 13:24-37

*Gospeller* The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to Mark.  
*People* **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

[Jesus said,] <sup>24</sup>“In those days, after that suffering,  
the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light,  
<sup>25</sup>and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup>Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup>Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>28</sup>“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>32</sup>“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup>Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup>It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup>Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup>or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup>And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”



*Gospeller* The Gospel of the Lord.  
*People* **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

## Sermon

**Marion VanLoo**

*All then stand as they are able.*

## Nicene Creed

*Presider* Let us affirm the faith of the Church using the words of the Nicene Creed.

**We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.  
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,**

**true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation**

**he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and became truly human.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven**

**and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],  
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.**

**We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.**

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

*All remain standing as they are able.*

## **Prayers of the People**

*Presider* Sisters and brothers, children of God, our Creator made the stars of night, the sun, and the moon, God is the light by which we wake and work. Lord, be with us as we pray, “Illumine our darkness, and keep us alert.”

*Intercessor* Surround your church, her leaders, and people, with your armor of light. Strengthen them as they reach out to you in prayer and hope. Open their hearts to your will. **Illumine our darkness, and keep us alert.**

*Silence is kept*

We pray for our leaders: especially Joseph, our president; Gretchen, our governor; and the Congress and courts of this land. Savior of the nations, guide those who govern, and awaken those they lead, that we may all live in the spirit of cooperation and share so that all have enough: food, care, and peace. **Illumine our darkness, and keep us alert.**

*Silence is kept*

For people across the world, whose spirits bend under the yoke of oppression and struggle, give the people of this community a sense of togetherness and support. Open our eyes to those who fall by the wayside, whose faces and needs remain invisible. Accept our thankfulness for, and

teach us to follow in the way of, your never-ending generosity [especially\_\_\_\_\_].  
**Illumine our darkness, and keep us alert.**

*Silence is kept*

Christ the King, you are ruler of all things in heaven and earth. Hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all a burning heart for our congregation, and all things necessary for our common life, and the embrace of the ministries with which you have gifted everyone. Bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church. **Illumine our darkness, and keep us alert.**

*Silence is kept*

God our Ruler, we rely on, and give thanks for, your divine wisdom, knowledge and understanding. We know that, because of your Holy Spirit's guidance, we can make the right decisions in line with your will and purpose for this parish. We ask for the Spirit of discernment, that we each may be enabled to make those decisions that will lead us to the serving of your church in this place **Illumine our darkness, and keep us alert.**

*Silence is kept*

Lover of our souls, you continue to mold us in your image and hold us in your hands. We lift up all those who are facing illness [remembering\_\_\_\_\_]. Bring healing, comfort, and peace to their bodies. Calm their fears and let them experience the healing power of your love. Lend skill and compassion to their healers, and bless the means of their care. Give them such confidence in the power of your grace that, even when they are afraid, they may put their whole trust in you.

*Silence is kept*

Christ the King, you are good: we pray you: seek the lost, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak [remembering\_\_\_\_\_ and] all the sad and sick in their afflictions, and save them from their troubles. **Illumine our darkness, and keep us alert.**

*Silence is kept*

Father of us all, we pray for those who have recently returned to your embrace, and those who are broken with grief [remembering\_\_\_\_\_]. Hold the bereaved in your everlasting arms of love. **Illumine our darkness, and keep us alert.**

*Prsider* Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; for this we pray. **Amen.**



## Confession of Sin

*The Presider says to the people*

Jesus said, "The first commandment is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." *Mark 12:29-31*

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbors.

*All remain standing, or kneel, as they are able.*

*Silence may be kept.*

*Minister and People*

**Most merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will,  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name. Amen.**

*A Priest stands and says*

Almighty God have mercy on you, + forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life.  
**Amen.**

*All then stand as they are able.*

## Peace

*Presider* The peace of Christ be always with you.

*People* **And also with you.**

*The Ministers and the People may offer God's peace to one another in the name of the Lord.*

*The People then are seated.*

## Announcements

# Holy Communion

*Representatives of the congregation bring the people's offerings of bread and wine, and money or other gifts, to the Presider.*

*The people stand while the offerings are presented and placed on the Altar*

## Offertory Hymn

## Doxology

**Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God above, you heav'nly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

*The people remain standing as they are able*

## Great Thanksgiving

*Presider*           The Lord be with you.  
*People*             **And also with you.**  
*Presider*           Lift up your hearts.  
*People*             **We lift them to the Lord.**  
*Presider*           Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
*People*             **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

*The Presider proceeds*

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Because you sent your beloved Son to redeem us from sin and death, and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever to proclaim the glory of your Name:

## Sanctus

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

*The people continue to stand, or kneel, as they are able.*

*The Presider continues*

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

*The Presider continues*

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them **+** by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him.

Sanctify us also **+** that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. **AMEN.**

*The Presider then continues*

As our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,**

**hallowed be thy Name,**

**thy kingdom come,**

**thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.  
 And forgive us our trespasses,  
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
 And lead us not into temptation,  
 but deliver us from evil.  
 For thine is the kingdom,  
 and the power, and the glory,  
 forever and ever. Amen.**

**Breaking of the Bread**

*A period of silence is kept.*

*The Presider says*

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;  
**Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.**

These are the Gifts of God.  
**And we are the people of God.**

*All are welcome to receive Holy Communion.*

*Remaining seated, the following is sung after the table has been cleared.*

**Communion Hymn**

**Hymnal 56**

*O come, O come, Emmanuel*



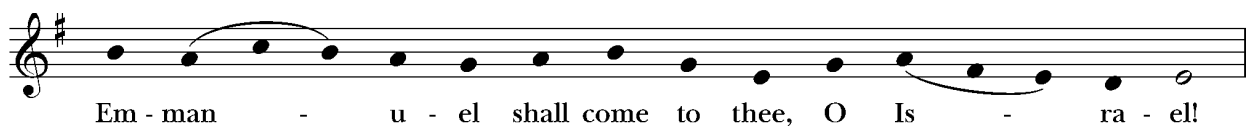
1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som  
 6 O come, thou Day - spring from on high, and cheer us



1 cap - tive Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile  
 6 by thy draw - ing nigh; dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of



1 here un - til the Son of God ap - pear. Re - joice! Re - joice!  
 6 night, and death's dark shad - ow put to flight.



*After Communion, the Presider says*

Let us pray.

*Presider and People*

**God of abundance,  
you have fed us  
with the bread of life and cup of salvation;  
you have united us  
with Christ and one another;  
and you have made us one  
with all your people in heaven and on earth.  
Now send us forth  
in the power of your Spirit,  
that we may proclaim your redeeming love to the world  
and continue for ever  
in the risen life of Christ our Savior. Amen.**

## **Blessing**

*A priest blesses the people, saying*

May Almighty God, by whose providence our Savior Christ came among us in great humility, sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin. **Amen.**

May he whose second Coming in power and great glory we await, make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love. **Amen.**

May you, who rejoice in the first Advent of our Redeemer, at his second Advent be rewarded with unending life. **Amen.**

And may the blessing of the Holy One who made you,  
†Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer be with you today and always. **Amen.**

## **Concluding Hymn**

*The king shall come when morning dawns*

**Hymnal 73**

1 The King shall come when morn - ing dawns and  
 2 Not, as of old, a lit - tle child, to  
 3 The King shall come when morn - ing dawns and  
 4 and let the end - less bliss be - gin, by  
 5 The King shall come when morn - ing dawns and

1 light tri - um - phant breaks; when beau - ty gilds the  
 2 bear, and fight, and die, but crowned with glo - ry  
 3 earth's dark night is past; O haste the ris - ing  
 4 wear - y saints fore - told, when right shall tri - umph  
 5 light and beau - ty brings: Hail, Christ the Lord! Thy

1 east - ern hills and life to joy a - wakes.  
 2 like the sun that lights the morn - ing sky.  
 3 of that morn, the day that e'er shall last;  
 4 o - ver wrong, and truth shall be ex - tolled.  
 5 peo - ple pray, come quick - ly, King of kings.

## Dismissal

*Minister* And now, my brothers and sisters, I bid you go out as did St Barnabas, the Encourager. Go out with joy and in peace, to love and serve our Lord.

*People* **Thanks be to God.**

## Postlude

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**This week in prayer**

**Please remember these persons and congregations in your prayers this week:**

**Our Bishops** Bonnie, Michael, Justin, Moises (TEC); Elizabeth, Donald and Craig (ELCA)  
**and for** all priests, deacons, Ministry Teams, and those in formation

**Anglican Cycle of Prayer:**

December 3 The Episcopal Church in the Philippines

**Diocese of Michigan Cycle of Prayer:**

December 3 St Clare of Assisi, Ann Arbor, St Michael’s, Grosse Pte Woods; Holy Family, Santo Domingo, DR

**St Barnabas Cycle of Prayer:** Nancy, Bill S, Margaret

**and our continuing prayers for:** Bob, Carlos, Jim M, Mardi, Robert, Selenah

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Faith in Action provides leadership in collecting donations to support households in need in the Chelsea and Dexter areas. They are in need of our continuing help. You may bring your donations to FIA, or to Nancy who will see that they get there. **If you bring food directly to FIA**, please let Nancy know, so she can continue to keep our records of donation. If you write a check, please make it to *Faith In Action*. The **next Food Drive at the church is December 17**. Please contribute as generously as you can.

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**Upcoming Commemorations**

- December 3 Francis Xavier, Priest and Missionary, 1552
- 4 John of Damascus, Priest and Theologian, c.760
- 5 Clement of Alexandria, Priest and Theologian, c.210
- 6 Nicholas of Myra, Bishop, c. 342
- 7 Ambrose of Milan, Bishop and Theologian, 397
- 8 Richard Baxter: Pastor and Writer, 1691

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**Advent 1B December 3, 2023**

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

**During Advent and Christmas**, we will be using study prompts and other activities tied to the sermon for the week. Read the sermon aloud and follow-up with spoken responses to the two questions at the end. Find our full sermon compilation for individual, small group, or congregational use, Sermons for Advent and Christmas 2023 at [www.sermonsthatwork.org](http://www.sermonsthatwork.org).

## ***Bearing Witness***

Advent—that wondrous season of longing, penitence, and expectation—is upon us. The Advent candles and the purple or blue altar linens and vestments are pulled from their closets. This season is one of introspection and fasting, all in the service of entering into an embodied dramatization of the birth of Jesus through liturgical rhythms.

In the coming weeks, the Advent readings will walk us through the story of John the Baptizer and continue on to the angel Gabriel’s Annunciation to Mary. But before the heavenly hosts show up, before the shepherds find the baby in the manger, the lections point us to the apocalyptic. Traditionally, Advent is a period when the church dons bi-focal lenses: reenacting the great yearning and expectation for the Messiah articulated in the Hebrew Scriptures while simultaneously looking to the second coming of Jesus.

That first sense of longing is felt in the lyrics of today’s psalm, where three times the refrain is voiced, “Restore us, O God of hosts; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.”

The weight of anticipation for divine deliverance is perhaps even more keenly pronounced in the passage from Isaiah 64: “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!” The desperation of the prophet is almost palpable. It is a cry that can only emerge from a place of anguish and desolation. And it is a cry that reverberates today in the hearts of all those suffering oppression, war, or injustice: God, when will you return? When will the second coming of Jesus take place? When will you rend the heavens and come to liberate us all?

The gospel reading for today from Mark addresses just this question. Initially, Jesus seems to give the disciples portents or signs of his return with a picture of apocalyptic terror. At the end of all things, what theologians refer to as the eschaton, there will be suffering. The sun will be darkened. The moon will not be giving its light. The stars will fall from heaven. He then offers a horticulture analogy. Just as the ripe fig heralds summer, Jesus says, “When you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.”

And yet as soon as Jesus indicates that there might be clues that the end is truly nigh, he takes it all back. He says, “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.” Not even Jesus knows! And if not even Jesus knows, then how could anyone correctly predict the portents and signs and omens? Here, what seemed like a teaching of interpreting prophecies of signs now shifts through this last bit of the passage. The instruction is not to spend time and energy trying to make predictions of the future, but instead, the injunction is to keep watch.

But what does this keeping watch mean, if not to interpret the signs? Jesus, as he so often does, offers a parable. He describes a landowner going away on a journey and commanding the doorkeeper to keep watch. The doorkeeper is instructed to stay awake, but there is no indication of when the landowner might return. Jesus concludes this parable by instructing the disciples, “Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

But this is an impossible task. One cannot keep constant vigilance without fatigue. And yet, three times in this passage, Jesus instructs his disciples: Keep watch.

New Testament scholar Leroy Huizenga points out that this injunction in Mark 13 to keep watch is literarily connected to the events that unfold in the Garden of Gethsemane one chapter later. The temporal pattern of the owner’s return is not of a twenty-four-hour system but of evening, midnight, cockcrow, or dawn. This four-part division of time mirrors the events of Jesus’ final night: the last supper in the evening, the arrest in the night, denial by Peter at



cockcrow, and delivery to Pilate in the morning. Furthermore, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus thrice tells his close disciples to keep watch with him. And thrice they fail. They fail to stay awake with him in his final hours.

So, what's Mark doing here? What do the events of Gethsemane have to do with the end times? What does Jesus' arrest and death have to do with the apocalyptic? Mark is setting up this literary mirror to let the reader know that the apocalypse is wrapped up in something bigger than knowing when the End will come.

Keeping watch does not mean paying attention so one can be "in the know" about what is happening or what will happen next. The call to be watchful, alert, and aware is an invitation into the unfolding divine mystery. This mystery is somehow personal yet universal, offering glimpses of a boundless God amongst a groaning creation.

At the crux of human finitude and divine transcendence sits a holy uncertainty. Mark makes it clear that it is impossible to fix our eyes on the moment of the Messianic return. And in that uncertainty, we fix our eyes on the one thing we can: The person and promise of Jesus Christ. The mystery of the Incarnation is impossible to disentangle from the mystery of the eschaton, which is, in turn, impossible to disentangle from the mysteries of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Fixing our eyes on Jesus means embracing these mysteries in all their fullness and in their incomprehensibility.

This Advent, let us heed this call to keep watch both spiritually and also within the physical world. Jesus directs us to keep watch in Gethsemane. He directs our gaze to the anguish around us: to the destruction of the temple; to the horrors of war; to the anxieties borne from all threats to human life. In this holy uncertainty, Christians are called to be attentive to the suffering of the present. The failure of the apostles in Gethsemane becomes our failure when we turn our gaze away from those in anguish.

Episcopal priest Fleming Rutledge notes that, as an Advent people, the church is called both to wait and to bear witness. She writes, "Bearing witness is an active stance; waiting is a passive stance. Both are part of the message of the herald of the age to come."

In keeping watch—in entering into solidarity with the sick, imprisoned, and oppressed—we will find ourselves waiting in the depths crying out, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!" But our gaze is directed not only at Gethsemane but to the promise of the resurrected Messiah: That suffering, death, and agony will not have the final say. And for that promise, we also keep watch. As a church and as an Advent people, we bear witness to that promise together. There will be suffering around us. There will be pain. There will be anxiety. And in those moments of feeling like the world is crumbling around us, there comes a whisper of Messianic hope: Keep watch.

## **Prompts**

1. Is there a piece of music you know that evokes themes of longing, expectation, and hope? Play that piece and reflect on how the music connected to this sermon.
2. Advent is a time of anticipation. What have you been anticipating this season? Do you find it difficult or easy to watch and wait?

*This study was written by Michael Toy*

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**Our Mission:**

We seek to grow as diverse disciples of Jesus Christ, and to serve Jesus by serving others in the world, guided by the values of Ancient Rites, Open Minds, and Affirming Hearts.



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