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November 30, 2025- Advent 1A
Given at Christ Church Quaker Farms, Oxford, CT

Isaiah 2.1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13.11-14; Matthew 24.36-44

"You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected time." †

Advent marks new beginnings… New things. It is the start of a new Church year, a time when we Christians on our Spiritual journey together, begin our journey afresh!
The readings for this first Sunday of Advent are *apocalyptic*, that is, they point toward some revelation… to something hidden about the future … about the destiny of the world… the end of the present age and great things to come in the future. There is a sense of the unexpected and yet also of *hope*. In them is a sense of great anticipation!

When I was young, in elementary school, I used to really look forward to Advent— those weeks of preparation before Christmas. It was one of the few times when the weather got cooler in South Florida, school was out, I had time with family and friends, and there was great *anticipation*. There was excitement that Christmas was coming, there would be time to relax, to receive presents, to enjoy time with my family.
However, when I got older, I started to view this season a bit differently. It became less about *anticipation* and more about *expectation*. It seemed overwhelming, all about being busy. During college and medical school, it was about finishing papers, and doing extra work shifts to be able to buy presents for my family and friends. It was about rushing around to set-up the tree and put up all the lights and decorations.
After I became a physician, it seemed to be a time I needed to work three-times harder, taking extra call days and extra shifts, just to be able to have just one day off during the holidays. Similarly, as a parish priest it was about more liturgies to plan and lead. It felt more like I HAD too much to do… and dreaded having to go to parties and thus I rarely looked forward to spending time with friends. It turned into something not exciting, but exhausting, or so I felt. It became all about *expectation and not anticipation*… and not much about hope. Bah humbug! After all, society tells us it's all about being busy, the shopping, the planning, the parties! Or is it?

Well, thankfully, the Church insists that this season is, indeed, about joyful anticipation! Our faith reminds us, it's about anticipating of the incarnation of Christ! It's *not* about shopping and rushing and doing. It's not about trying to impress others with our before-Christmas accomplishments… it is about *hopeful watching and waiting.*
Notice how our liturgy has changed. The decorations and vestments are darker—violet or blue—the music we sing has changed, its softer, less elaborate, more somber, and we sing about what is to come. We light Advent candles to symbolize our hope, our peace, our joy, and our desire for love in Christ. Advent is about watching and waiting.

I'm not sure how many of you noticed it, but I found the language striking in today's reading from the prophet Isaiah— **"**The ***word*** that Isaiah… ***saw*** concerning… the days to come." The Hebrew word used literally means "to see" or "to perceive." We often think about hearing the

word or reading words, but the prophets of old were "visionaries," they focused on God's promises and *saw* what was to come.
And later, in the Fourth Gospel, we learn that *this* "vision," this "word" became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1). Again, the Word of God made visible! With this in mind, the message of Advent is pretty clear: Look around and watch!

This is reinforced by today's Gospel passage (from Matthew). Some people claim this is Jesus' foretelling of 'the rapture' at the end of the age, when those who are saved will be taken with Christ to the heavens and others will be left behind.
Jesus' focus is not on other-worldly things, it's about the present world in which we live. His concern is the people in the field, those at the mill, those literally in the midst of the daily grind, those in the ordinary places of human endeavor, where *life is lived.* And he insists that it *is in these* places and at *these* time— the mundane and the average aspects of life— that revelation occurs. That's when what was hidden is revealed; that's when God comes to us.

With that in mind… I can't help but share a quick story about 'the rapture' that was told to me by a colleague. You see he attended a rather conservation/ born-again evangelical seminary. One of his classmates was fixated on the Second coming of Christ and the rapture… and regularly questioned who among them in that community may be one of the chosen elect— 'You know some of you guys will be left behind when He comes for the rest of us… just look at your lives… it's in scripture! Some of you will still be here when he comes…. So sad!'
As you can imagine, he wasn't very popular with his classmates, who were sick of his self-righteousness and his judgement of others. So, they decided to get even.
One year they planned a grand Holiday party with food and school-wide gathering, posted the date and time and place all over, and announced it at all meetings (only *they* really knew the correct time… he was told to come about 10 mins later to the grand parlor of the main dorms). As he approached, he heard voices and music and saw lights… but when he entered the room everything went dark with a loud startling bang… and then when lights were back on there was still music and lights, decorations and food… but no people.
There were plates full of half-eaten warm food laying on the furniture and hot drinks… but no people! And then out of the kitchen came one of his classmates, who was a one of the school's worst students and often spent too much time going out on dates and doing other 'non-seminary' things… "Oh, did you get left behind too? Wow! Who knew?"
My friend said all you could hear was a loud scream, "No God, No!" It was then that everyone came out from hiding… Yeah, probably not a Christian thing to do, but I 'm sure it was a lesson he never forgot!

Again, it's in the midst of the mundane that revelation occurs! For Jesus, the emphasis here is not so much *what we* do, but our awareness and sensitivity when *we're doing stuff*. It's about mindfulness... it's about watching and waiting, for God will come when least expected.
About that future day, Scripture tell us "no one knows"… "The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour"… suddenly like a thief in the night. So, consider how Jesus might appear suddenly, just around the corner as a hungry person, suddenly like a neighbor who is ill-clothed, suddenly like someone who is sick or in trouble, suddenly like a family in need. As we *saw* in the scriptures, "Therefore you must be ready" (vs 44). For the Son of Man is near. ✝