Today, on this 1st Sunday of Advent, we begin a new season on the liturgical church calendar. Advent is a season of reflection as we look back into our past while fixing our eyes on what is to come. The word “Advent” as derived out of Latin means “coming” or “to come”. During this season, we remember that Christ has come and has promised us to come once again, offering us glimmer of HOPE during time of uncertainties when everything seems to be flipped upside down and inside out. Unfortunately that is the world that we live in today.

Advent culminates on the Eve of Christmas when we remember and welcome Christ into our midst, but we’re not there quite yet. There’s a lot that needs t happen from now until then. Just as we have decorations to put up in our homes to remind us of the season, we are reminded that we too have preparations to be put up in our hearts in anticipation for the coming of Christ. We’re not there…at least not just yet!

Our text this morning taken from the Gospel of Mark reminds us that we must remain alert by staying awake, as we patiently wait for the Lord’s coming during this Advent Season. Normally, on this 1st Sunday of Advent, we would hear an Apocalyptic text reminding us of the End is near and that Christ is coming back soon. **This is our spiritual “wake up call”.** It is not meant to scare us or anything but instead it keeps our faith honestly grounded. It affirms our HOPE of deliverance through Christ when things seem intolerable. We have this hope that Christ will return to rescue us once again. Advent is like the snooze button on your alarm clock, that gives us a warning before the appointed time. If you keep ignoring the buzzer, there WILL be fatal and detrimental consequences.

There is both good news and bad news. The good news is, we know that Christ will come as He has promised. But the bad news is, we don’t know when. As our passage pointed out earlier, no one knows the exact hour or the date when the Master may return, but the servants were being entrusted with various tasks as the master goes away. When the master returns, there will be judgement upon what we have done with what God has entrusted us with. There will be no room for negotiation or bargaining before the judgement throne. There’s no time to be lazy or to remain idle either, as the master commanded the doorkeeper to be on the watch.[[1]](#footnote-1) We must pay full attention of our surroundings and watch for these tell-tale signs and not fall behind and falter in our faith. The Father had made a promise to the people and his promise shall be fulfilled. As Mark tells us, *heaven and earth will pass away, but God’s words will not pass away.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

This obviously was a metaphor that Jesus offered to us of what is to come. It gives us a sense of HOPE as we live in this “In-Between” (or liminal) time here on earth. We must keep watch and stay awake!

 The season of Advent is a season of waiting. But waiting for what? We often find ourselves caught in the middle of this religious vs. secular battleground, juggling our lives that are hanging on a balance. We ask ourselves, as we “waiting for Christmas or waiting for Christ?” There is a huge difference! As one theologian noted, ***“we know when Christmas will arrive, and what it will be like when it does. We know the script, we have the “to-do” list, and all we need to do is follow it. But waiting for Christ to come (or to come again) requires something more, an unexpectant watchfulness, because we never know when he will appear.”[[3]](#footnote-3)* Waiting for Christ requires a discipline of our hearts in all that we do and live.** So what are we waiting for? Christmas or Christ?

 The Son of Man will return like a thief in the middle of the night, without any kind of warnings whatsoever. We must always be prepared and not be caught off-guard. We must stay awake and keep watch. **Only those who are prepared and ready will be saved, and those who are not, will be perished.[[4]](#footnote-4)**

On this 1st day of the liturgical New Year, it reminds us of keeping vigil on New Year’s Eve. I’m sure we have tried this by staying awake on New Year’s Eve and waiting for midnight when the ball drops at Times Square. But how many of us have also fallen asleep while trying to stay up till midnight? I know I have. Considering this year’s New Year’s Eve happens to fall on a Sunday, many of us probably will end up taking a nap before midnight. Somebody better wake me up a few minutes before the ball drops. But we cannot always count on someone else to wake us up, we must take full responsibility of ourselves.

In the same way, when we are waiting for Christ’s return, not only must we stay awake, but we must remain vigilant of what’s around us. We’re not to remain idle and to wait for the time to come, for God has commissioned us with works to do. No napping is allowed before midnight! We must keep our eyes opened for one another.

Often times, we find ourselves “skipping ahead” to what’s to come, when in fact Christ has called upon us to look no further than what we have at hand by preparing our hearts and our souls for his coming. It will eventually come, soon and very soon, but not quite just yet. We cannot take that chance that someone is going to wake us up and bail us out right before midnight. We must stay awake and remain diligent and watchful.

 **The world that we live in today is need of Christ’s light more than ever before.** During this season of light, we need to put on some of these filters on our eyes and in our hearts. We need to look beyond those dazzling displays of holiday lights at the stores, around our houses and on our trees, but more importantly we must lay aside the various forms of temptations and distractions of our world today. We must live our lives by fixing our eyes on the true light of Christ, who outshines all the other lights in this world while exposes the darkness of sins and evils among us.

But until that day Christ comes once again, there are still works to be done. We’ve been commissioned to bring HOPE upon those who may still be living in the darkness of this world, especially in times when things seem chaotic, turning upside-down and inside out, when things don’t quite make sense no matter how you look at it.

Some may be living in fears in various parts of the world (or even on the streets of our neighborhood) that are under threats of violence and attacks. **They need HOPE in Christ!** Some may be living as refugees in exile or as evacuees temporarily displaced out of their homeland due to recent hurricanes and other natural disasters. **They need HOPE in Christ!**  Some may be immigrants, racial and religious minorities in this country who are fearful about their future residence and status. **They need HOPE in Christ!** Some may be traumatized by recent random shootings and terrorist attacks whether in schools, concert venues, shopping malls, or even in a Sunday morning church service. Their lives have forever been changed and altered. **They need HOPE in Christ!**

Some may be struggling to meet end’s need, without proper healthcare or a place to rest their heads.  **They need HOPE in Christ!** Some may be too sick and too tired or are in search of meaning, direction, and purpose in life with friends and families.  **They need HOPE in Christ!** Some may be in mourning and grieving the loss of loved ones with an empty void in their hearts. **They need HOPE in Christ!**

These are all children of God in search of God’s HOPE and PEACE in this world. These are neighbors that Christ commanded us to love from near and afar because God’s love bears no barriers and overcomes all walls and boundaries.

As another theologian commented on our apocalyptic passage this morning, he wrote, “*just as the Lord predicts before the End of time comes, there will be challenges and trials among us. There will be wars, violence, and bloodshed.* *Things may get worse before they get better. But hang on just a little longer, because just when we are sure we cannot endure, God will intervene to turn the world right side up.[[5]](#footnote-5)*

This is the very hope that the Israelites were yearning for generations while waiting for their expected Savior to come.

 As we light each of the Advent candles one by one over the next few weeks, may we be reminded of what this season is truly all about, as we patiently wait and not skip ahead of what is to come. Let this season simmer a little so we can savor it more, as we contemplate upon the expected Savior who has come and is coming once again. **This is not about what WE make of Christmas but instead, what Christ makes of us and what Christ shapes us to be. Let us recommit ourselves by putting Christ first once again and let Christ’s HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE reign in our hearts and in this broken world.** As the prophet Isaiah declared, ***the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- onto them a light has shined.[[6]](#footnote-6)***

During this holiday season, may we look beyond ourselves by identifying someone who might need a little more “Jesus” than we do. Let us share this Jesus with others through Christ’s mercy, compassion, and kindness. Let us **stay awake, not fall asleep** and **be vigilant** of the long-expected Savior.

 In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Mark 13:33-34* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Mark 13:31* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Copenhaver, Martin R. *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol 1. P.25* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Burgess John P., *Feasting on the Word, Year A Vol. 1,* P.22 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Hutson Christopher R. Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1, p.24* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Isaiah 9:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)