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“Be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come” (Matt 24:44).

First Sunday of Advent

[Is 2:1-5](#); [Ps 122](#); [Rom 13:11-14](#); [Matt 24:37-44](#)

The First Sunday of Advent briefly holds us in the darkness before dawn. The Scripture readings emphasize our absolute need for God as one liturgical year ends and another begins. Christian hope assures us that as difficult as life can get, God is always present and in control. Yet hope must be embraced. Faith is not passive; it asks us to put our lives on the line.

Ancient Israel was formed in an encounter with the God who “hears the cry of the poor.” The Hebrew Exodus from slavery to freedom was remembered at every Passover. Even in exile, Jews sang the songs of God’s faithfulness. The promised messiah would bring the peace they dreamed of when nations “shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4).

For Christians, Jesus is the fulfillment of every prophecy and promise. The early church faced persecution after Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE. Matthew interprets history with the words Jesus spoke when he wept over the city before his death: “Stay awake, you do not know the day or the hour.” Jesus recalled the foolishness of people before the deluge when Noah built the ark. He warned of calamity so sudden that one person at the grinding mill would be spared, another taken, and compared judgment to the shock felt when a thief breaks into an unguarded house.

Advent puts us on notice. Something new is about to happen. Be ready. Be open. Even our theology and 20 centuries of religion do not prepare us for God’s surprises, which are always more than we expect or can control. We do know this, that we will be drawn into the same mystery Jesus passed through when he entered his glory by way of the cross.

Hope is not escape from adversity but the assurance that whatever happens, we will meet every trial and that God will always be with us. The “work of the people” that is the very meaning of liturgy calls us to do our best, to listen to the Spirit and to act on what we hear. Advent is Good News. God is coming closer to us, so let us meet God in the depths of our human struggle, where the Word appears like the first light of dawn.