

**Series: Come, Let Us Adore Him**  
**Sermon: Preparations**  
**Scripture: Luke 21:15-36**

**First Sunday of Advent**  
**December 1, 2024**  
**Rev. Karen H Roberts**

*25 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." 29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 34 "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, 35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving. I had the joy of hosting my family Thanksgiving meal this year and while it all went great, I learned very quickly that I've reached the age where I easily lose my focus and my ability to keep track of what I'm doing. You know what I mean? You catch yourself standing in the laundry room trying to figure out why you went in there, only to eventually remember you had actually been headed to the refrigerator, only to backtrack to the refrigerator and stand there with the door open staring blankly into it trying to remember what you wanted from there, only to finally realize it was water you came into the kitchen for because you needed to take some Tylenol to deal with the headache you now have from trying to remember all the things. Just me?

It is easy to lose focus and forget our purpose – that isn't just an aging thing – it's a human thing. It's why we need seasons, such as Advent, to remind us what it is...or who it is...we are looking for.

Today is the first Sunday OF Advent – not IN Advent. Advent isn't something we endure, like a time set on a calendar....Advent is something we become. It is a work of preparing for the fullness of hope, peace, love, and joy that Jesus will bring that should transform us and our faith in those promises. Similar to what Pastor Jim said, about the hymn writer of our first hymn: Advent is head up, eyes open to the where we are and who we are, in ways that allow us to see glimpses of where we will be and who we will be when Christ comes and is allowed to reign as our Lord. Advent is a state of being in which the flicker of these flames, reveals signs of Christ's reign everywhere...even in the darkest places.

Even though I recognize that we get weary of looking at the state of the world around us and we would much prefer to jump to the nostalgic and peaceful memories of the Christmas story complete with sweet angels singing, and shepherds rejoicing, and Mary and baby beautifully settled, dreaming of all that will be possible, as mothers are prone to do when they hold their babies...We can't ignore the world into which that story unfolded....a world of political turmoil,

and violent times, and famine, and struggle, and disease, and hardship. How do we understand the miracle if we don't acknowledge the need for one?

We heard the words of the prophet Jeremiah at the beginning of the service: "The days are surely coming when I shall fulfill my promise..." We always need to remember that a prophet's role was not to predict the future, but to speak God's words of truth to the people. Prophets are God's messengers and it was in this vein that Jesus, in naming the distress of the world, said, "Now, when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." While his words of distress and confusion, fear and foreboding, sound threatening and ominous, we need to look at them, not as a prediction, but as a reality check. This is the world we live in...the earth feels in chaos, people are being driven by fear and foreboding...we do feel shaken. Advent doesn't ask for us to push that out of sight and stick our head in the sand so we can just focus on the lovely Christmas story vision. Advent is the time in which we heed Jesus' call to see our reality and **STAND UP, RAISE OUR HEADS**, and see that the promises of God are still being worked out in our midst.

To be a people of faith means that we look back at the stories of darkness and remember the light that came to dwell among us. We look back and remember Jesus sent to save us. We also look forward, to the day when Jesus returns and fulfills all the promises we have been waiting on. We look forward to the day when good wins and light prevails once and for all. But being a people of faith also means looking around...look up, look down, look in and under, look around and on top of. Be on guard, Jesus says, don't get weighed down and try to compensate for your fear and worry with partying and overindulgence, stay focused, don't miss any of it because even in the midst of the scary parts...maybe especially in the midst of the scary parts...there are glimpsed of the kingdom everywhere...sightings of a savior all over the place...if we will just pay attention.

There is a reason that evergreens, and lights, and colorful displays are a hallmark of our faith this time of year...there are reasons our tree is decorated with Chrismons, each a symbol of an aspect of Christ's reign...there are reasons our hearts are warmer and our generosity deeper in this season...there are reasons for advent candles and white lights and communion tables and invitations to come and eat, to take and sip...because these things are symbols of Christ's presence, that was, that is, and that is to come.

So, don't be disappointed that we aren't jumping right into the Christmas story...because your story...where you are right now...is what gives the Christmas story meaning and helps us see it for what it is...a joyful miracle that allows a weary world to rejoice.

Let's not be so busy preparing for Christmas, that we lose focus on where we are and what we are looking for. Let's keep our heads up, our eyes open, the gates of our hearts lifted so that we can be prepared to glimpse the fullness of Christ that we long for.