

Advent 1 Isaiah 2, 1-5 with Mat 24, 36-44 30th Nov 2025

Prayer: Lord, lead and guide us by your Spirit as we look at your word today.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent...Are you ready??

For Christmas? No...I mean for Christ's return!

In some ways I think I feel more prepared for Christ's return than I do for Christmas!! I don't feel at all ready for celebrating Christmas, I don't have any presents and I haven't made the cake yet, I've begun choosing some music for the coming Christmas services but I'm certainly not ready...it feels like it will arrive much too quickly!

Why do I feel more prepared for Christ's return? Because I don't need to rush around 'doing' things, it's more about making sure I keep walking in faith with him every day, keeping my eyes on Jesus, following him and his expectations rather than the pressures and expectations of the world!

Has anyone got an advent calendar? And opened your first window to get a chocolate this morning? We'll be putting up our magnetic stable on the fridge with figures to add every day. While advent calendars countdown to Christmas, and there is a sense of celebratory anticipation (or stress!) as most in the secular world prepare for Christmas, advent in the Church calendar is actually more about preparing for Christ's return and as we heard in our Matthew reading not all will be rejoicing on the day of Christ's return if they have not put their faith in him.

And while an advent calendar will count down the 25 days to the day we celebrate Christ's birth, we cannot count down the days when Jesus will return. We cannot wait until the final month/ 25 days before he returns to start getting ready, because Jesus says that:

"About that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the son, but only the father."

Jesus says that even he doesn't know when he will return. The Apostle Peter says in his second letter that to the Lord, 1000 years are like a day and a day like a 1000 years!

So, we need to be ready always, *because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*

We need to believe that Christ will come again, we declare this in our creed each week, we need to be ready by following him, but we do not need to waste time as some have over the years speculating over the exact time and season he will return. We need to trust that God knows the perfect timing, just like when he chose to send Jesus for the first time over 2000 years ago.

We do not need to be afraid, just like our joyous anticipation of celebrating Christmas and the birth of Jesus, we should look with joy to his second coming.

In the book of Isaiah, we read prophecies that we can link with the birth and death of Jesus. But some prophecies like the words we heard this morning from Isaiah 2, seem to look beyond that to a time when God's Kingdom will be fully established here on earth and the world will be transformed.

There is far too much pain and suffering caused by conflict around the world today. So we look forward to a time with no more conflict between nations, no more wars, and swords and spears can be turned into plowshares and pruning hooks. Or today, guns and bombs and military drones turned into harvesters and secateurs?

This is something to look forward to with joy! And in the book of Revelation, we read of a time with no more tears or pain or mourning.

So, what do we need to do be ready for Jesus' return or to be ready if we die before he returns? We don't know the day or hour when that might happen either and it is most probable to be before Jesus returns!

Especially as we get older, illness and disease are more likely, I know many of you know about heart conditions, cancer and just plain old age! But we may not be old...one of our nephews died in a car accident at 18 years of age. Many of you know that another nephew died of bowel cancer this year, aged 40. We need to be ready, walking with the Lord...

So, as Isaiah says:

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord...Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord..."

In biblical times, mountains where were people met God, think of Moses going up the mountain to meet with God. Other religions worshipped their foreign gods in the 'high places'. Jesus would go up a mountain to pray.

I often experience a closeness to God when I am up a mountain, especially if I have a view of God's amazing and beautiful creation. It causes me to worship him. But we know God meets with us wherever we are. I love my morning walks and dip in the beach, where I say good morning to the Father Son and Holy Spirit, when I pray for each member of my family and others as I go into the cold water, and commit my day to the Lord. If I haven't swum I do that as I finish my shower with cold water...asking God's blessings to rain down...

Isaiah begins by acknowledging that *in the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.*

Isaiah envisions the day when one 'holy mountain' will stand supreme – reducing all others to utter insignificance....like Paul who talks about the return of Jesus in Philippians 2; note he also mentions 'the highest place!'

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father. (Philippians 2: 9-11)

One day Jesus will return, and all will kneel before him...

In the meantime, we need to walk with him and learn his ways.

Isaiah says that as we go to the mountain, God will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths. He says the law will go out from Zion, the word from Jerusalem. We are to follow his law, listen to his word.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, Jesus is the word, and he will teach and guide us through the Holy Spirit who he sent to dwell in us.

We are to follow in his ways. If we do this, we *will* be ready to meet him, either at the time of our own death, or when he returns.

If you don't know Jesus' ways, then read the gospels. I took a memorial service on Monday, such services are a time for me to share the hope of eternal life as people hope that death is not the end for their loved one, and they consider their own mortality. On Monday, for some it was the first time they had been in a church, let alone heard the bible. I used to presume that most people knew John 3:16, but not anymore. So I told them that God loved them. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believed in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.* I also read from John 14, that Jesus has prepared a place for us to go when we die, and that he is the way, the truth and the life. As we read the gospels, we see how Jesus lived, and we read what he taught, that we are to believe in him, to love God and love others!

We are to worship God alone, above all else. Remember he is the one to be worshipped and adored. Keep close, keep talking with your heavenly Father who loves you, Jesus your saviour and friend who laid down his life for you and longs to bless you with abundant life, and keep in step with the Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you up daily, to guide you, to comfort you, to give you strength and courage for each day, boldness to share God's love with others.

Live as Christ modelled for us, welcoming all, loving and helping those in need, looking out for others, like the Red Frogs are doing with the schoolies this week. Cooking for someone who is sick, checking in on a lonely neighbour.

Live as the prophet Micah says in chapter 6, for...

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

In chapter 4 of Micah we read a very similar passage to what we heard in Isaiah 2, with the call to go up the mountain of the Lord to learn to walk in his ways and with *hope* for the future where there will be no more swords or training for war.

We continue to live in this hope today (we lit the *hope* candle for the first of advent this morning), looking forward with joy to the final return of Jesus and the establishment of God's Kingdom to reign forever.

But even today, here and now, while there is not peace in the world, and we live with illness and disease and suffering, we can live with God's hope, his peace, his love, and his joy as we put our trust in him.

So, I encourage you to go up the mountain, whatever, wherever that is for you, the beach, a quiet chair, the garden...go regularly and spend time with the Lord so you will walk closely, growing in his ways every day.

May this advent be a time not of rushed stressed Christmas preparations, but rather a time of drawing near to God and learning from him, so that we will always be ready for the day of his return, or the day of our earthly death.

Let us overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:13). Let us share the hope we have with those we meet, tell them about the wonder of Christmas, the greatest gift being Jesus, that they may also be ready for the Lord's return and live in peace and abundant life with Jesus today.

I began by asking if you were ready for the Lord's return, but we may wonder why the Lord is not ready to return yet – why doesn't he come to end the suffering in the world? Again in 2 Peter we read that the Lord is not slow in coming, in keeping his promises, but he is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but come to repentance. While I may feel ready, I long for my family members, friends, people on the island to come to know Jesus. Let's be praying for them and ask God for opportunities and the words to say to share our faith.

And may we look forward with anticipation, hope and joy to the day we meet Jesus face to face, are you looking forward to that?? when he will welcome us and he will reign with peace forever more...

Come, descendants of Jacob, children of God, *let us walk in the light of the Lord!*

Let us pray...Lord, we thank you for the promise of your return, help us to live in light of that hope, that we may ready with joy. Encourage us to share the hope that we have with our family, friends and strangers. In your son's precious name, Amen.