

WATCH

*The Day and Hour Unknown*

32 **“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.**

35 **“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”**

The word “advent” is Latin, and it means the coming, or the approach. We’re thinking about the coming of Jesus Christ. And with this season of Advent, we have the coming of a new church year – a new year of grace.

There are some things to notice around the church. We have decorations up – some here at the beginning of the season, but not all; not yet. That’s because Advent is a time of anticipation, not fulfillment. We will get to the fulfillment of the birth of Jesus Christ at the end of the season.

Our music is not Christmas music, not yet. It’s the advent music of expectation as the church longs for Christ’s coming. And so this season has a lot in common with the season of End Times which we just left – but there, the emphasis was more on the coming of Christ as our judge, and of our eternal home with him in heaven. Now, we remember that his second coming will be in the flesh just as his first coming was in the flesh, and we meditate more quietly on our personal preparation through repentance, watchfulness, and renewal.

We decorate our altar and our pulpit with blue – some churches use purple to accentuate Christ as the king; the blue we’re using this year symbolizes expectation, the expectation of the disciples as they stood looking up into the blue sky as Jesus ascended into heaven.

Before Jesus ascended, in fact, three days before he was crucified, Jesus told his disciples what was going to happen, and he promised them that he was going to return.

This is where we meet Jesus in our text in the Gospel of Mark. **“About that hour,”** Jesus said, **“No one knows – not even the angels in heaven.”** Imagine for a moment that you can see the angels. You’re not one of them, but maybe you’re making a documentary about them, and so you fly around with them and you can see what they do and hear what they say to one another. You’re aware of the assignments God gives

them every day – some short, some long; some difficult, some a little easier. And you notice that they wonder about when the world will end, when the creation of God will be unmade by God, and everything will change. But they don't know when it will be. This secret is withheld even from them.

But that's not the surprise to us. The surprise is that Jesus said: **"No one knows the hour, not the angels, nor the Son."** To understand this amazing, perplexing, almost outrageous claim by Jesus, we need to zoom in on that moment in time when he said it. He was in the Temple in Jerusalem. People were going in to pray. Some were the blind and lame and others he had healed when he came into the city on Palm Sunday. He had been teaching his disciples about the end of the world and about his second coming, and now he told them that he didn't even know when that would be.

This was only according to his human nature. Jesus is truly and completely God, and so he knows everything. But he chose to set aside some of that omniscience in order to humble himself. And Jesus humbled himself so much that he was even able to suffer torture at the hands of the Romans, insults from the lips of the Jews, and death at last on the cross.

To describe his return, Jesus compared himself to a man going away on a trip – and he left his servants to take care of things until he got back. **"Be on guard!"** Jesus said, **"Be alert!"** And when we think about this, we usually imagine ourselves to be the man watching at the door, watching for the Master to come back. But in the comparison, this little parable, I submit to you that you are not the man at the door. You are one of the other servants inside the house. They had their **assigned tasks**, and you have your assigned tasks.

You might be a mom, or a dad, or a student, or a business owner, or a worker – or maybe you're out of work today, or retired. But you have your work to do in the kingdom of God. Whatever role you have, God has commanded you to be faithful in that work, and to give him glory with it, whether you work in the government, or a bank, or a business, a farm, or in a classroom, or whatever it is.

And you have a role in your family. If you are a husband, be faithful and loving to your wife, and if you've been otherwise – you're sinning. Stop it. And go and love her.

If you're a wife, be faithful and loving and supportive of your husband. And if you've been otherwise – you're sinning. Stop it. And go and love him.

If you're not married, you are commanded to lead a pure, chaste and decent life, in word, in action, in browser history, and on every date. And if you've been otherwise – you're sinning. Stop it. And go and be a prospective spouse worthy of the one God will give you one day.

Our sins dump us into the basement of guilt, the unfinished, cold, rough, damp prison of shame. And the accusations of our sinfulness make us realize that we are not keeping ourselves ready for the Coming of Christ. We are setting ourselves up to be caught unready, unprepared, damned.

Human nature likes to postpone and put things off until the last possible moment, and even after the last possible moment. “Maybe tomorrow I’ll think about being a better spouse. Maybe tomorrow I won’t gossip, tomorrow I won’t steal, tomorrow I won’t lust, tomorrow I won’t hate, tomorrow I won’t disrespect. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.” But God doesn’t want us to plan to be a better person tomorrow. God demands that we change today. Now.

Maybe you have a question you’ve been wondering about. Some point of doctrine, some item in the way the Church does things, that you’ve wondered about; disagreed with, or even challenged. Have you gone into a Bible class to learn about why the church does what it does? Why we believe what we believe? Do you not have enough time?

Well, what’s important? Could you take a season off of one thing you do to find time to study God’s word – just for winter, perhaps?

We don’t know when Jesus is coming again, and in one respect, that should terrify us. Why? Because listen again to the list of times Jesus mentions as being times when we expect him: “**evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.**” None of these are during the day, when the sun is high and we’re at our best. No, these are the four watches of the night, when the sun is down and most of us sleep.

Jesus doesn’t mean we should never sleep. What he means is, we should be prepared. So prepare yourself first and foremost with **repentance**. Repentance means first of all being terrified of our status in God’s eyes because of our sins. The broken-hearted believer understands that if I try to do anything to look better in God’s eyes, I make it worse. If I try to bypass Christ by doing something on my own, I’ve given up on Christ, I’ve turned away from Christ, and I’ve compounded the guilt my sin. I’ve made it worse.

But then the Gospel comes. The gospel of forgiveness comes like dawn breaking at the end of long, dark night. The Bible assures us that Jesus’ forgiveness is ours, that he has done everything to erase our sins like they were never there. And the Gospel reaches out to us to turn around, turn away from sin and from temptation but also to turn away from fear and guilt, and to put all our weight on Jesus. Don’t hold anything back. Give it all to Christ, and toss away all of your doubt and uncertainty.

And filled with peace, live in joy. Love your wife like a husband who’s forgiven. Love your husband like a woman who’s been pronounced not guilty. Live as a child of God,

declared to be holy and pure, righteous and worthy of everything you've been promised.

This is how you watch and pray. This is how you are ready: Christ has made you ready. His Holy Spirit fills you and holds you by the hand and stands with you as we watch together until he comes again.

Amen