

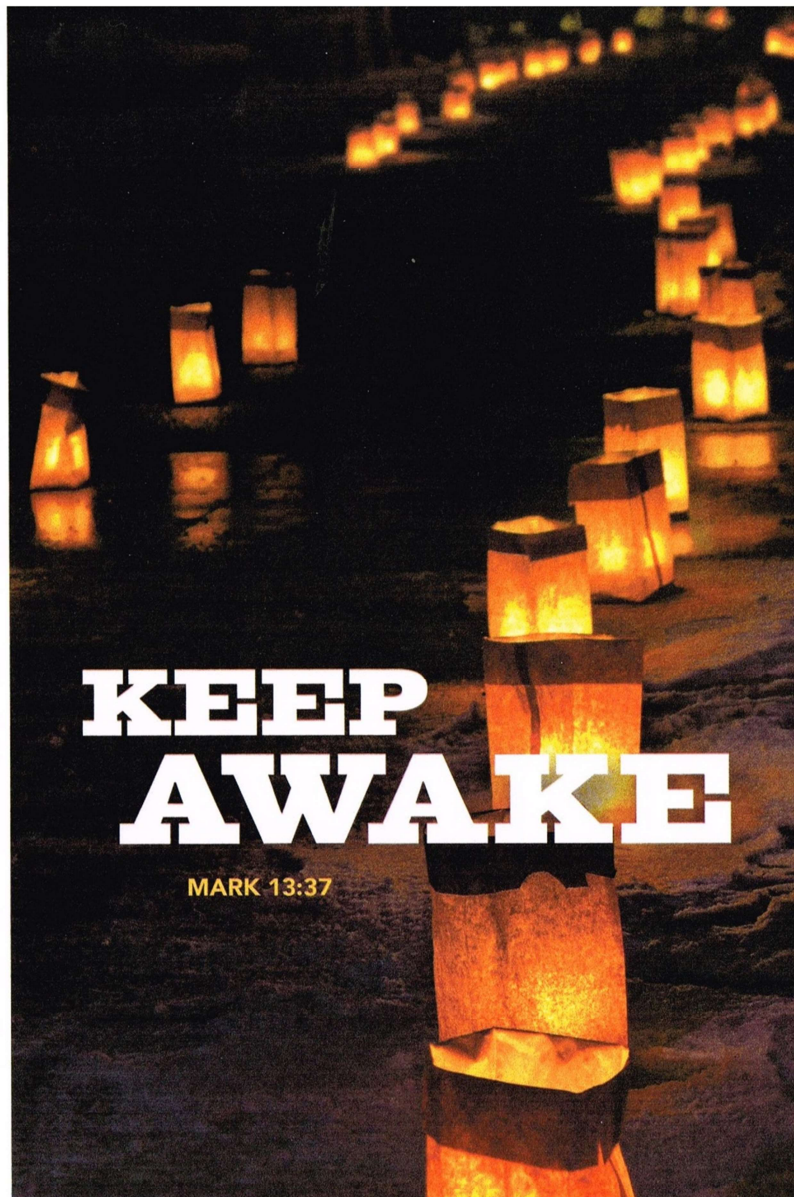
Learn from the Figs

Fig trees mature slowly. They don't require much maintenance, but they do require plenty of time to grow. Some fig trees take years to start producing fruit. It may be tempting to give up on a fig too soon, but the patient gardener knows to wait and watch for the subtle signs that the fig tree is about to produce.

"From the fig tree learn its lesson," Jesus says in today's gospel (Mark 13:28). Just as the gardener watches for indications that a bud is about to unfold, so should believers watch for where God's presence is emerging in the world.

Jesus' words in this passage paint a picture of God's arrival as unsettling and fearsome, with darkening skies and shaking celestial orbs. It is hard to imagine how anyone could miss such an arrival, yet Jesus warns his listeners that those who are not vigilant will be caught unaware. We must watch with care and patience for the signs of the coming of the Son of Man, like the gardener who watches for the ripening fig. If you think such signs can be ignored, you will miss the surprising, gentle cry of the incarnate God come as a tiny, vulnerable baby.

Today, at the beginning of Advent, we enter a season of waiting and watching as we anticipate with hope the coming of Christ's light into the world. Yet, even as we wait, there are active signs of God's presence all around us now—in water and word, in bread and wine, in the assembly gathered for worship. These signs remind us of God's gracious love toward us. At the same time, the lesson of the fig tree reminds us to stay curious and attentive, open to what might surprise us. God is always up to something new.





Celebrate

First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2020

Stir up your power, and come! The psalmist's plea in Psalm 80:2 has become familiar to us in the Advent prayers. Isaiah wants God to rip the heavens open. Both cry out for an apparently distant, angry God to show up, to save, to restore. When we hear Jesus describing the coming of the Son of Man with stars falling from heaven, it can sound dire and horrible, not like anything we would ever hope for. But when we really look at the suffering of people God loves, we can share the hope that God would tear open the heavens and come.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection awaken us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and keep us blameless until the coming of your new day, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading

Isaiah 64:1-9

This lament comes from a people who have had their hopes shattered. The visions of a rebuilt Jerusalem and a renewed people of God, spoken of in Isaiah 40–55, have not been realized. Instead, the people experience ruin, conflict, and famine. This lament calls God to account—to be the God who has brought deliverance in the past.

O that you would tear open the
heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake
at your presence—

²as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your
adversaries,

so that the nations might tremble
at your presence!

³When you did awesome deeds that
we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains
quaked at your presence.

⁴From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for
him.

⁵You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your
ways.

But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we
transgressed.

⁶We have all become like one who is
unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are
like a filthy cloth.

We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind,
take us away.

⁷There is no one who calls on your
name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face
from us,
and have delivered us into the
hand of our iniquity.

continued

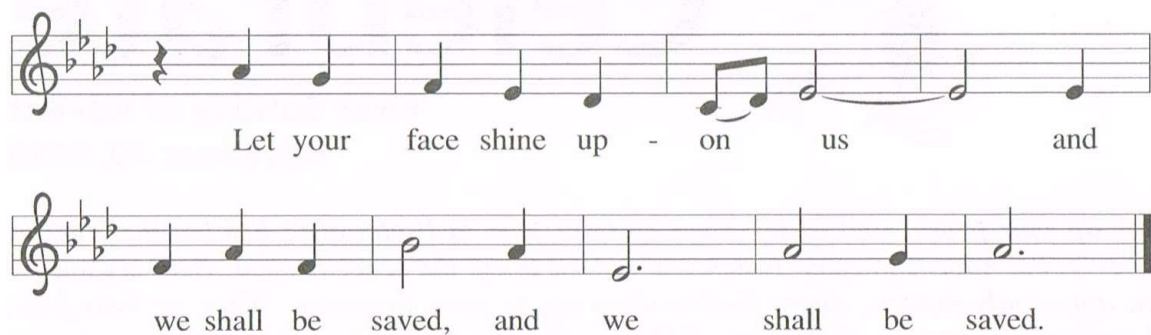
First Reading, continued

⁸Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our
potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
⁹Do not be exceedingly angry,
O LORD,

and do not remember iniquity
forever.
Now consider, we are all your
people.

Psalm

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; refrain, Ps. 80:7



Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph ¹ like a flock;
shine forth, you that are enthroned up- ¹ on the cherubim.

²In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, ¹ and Manasseh,
stir up your strength and ¹ come to help us.

³Restore ¹ us, O God;
let your face shine upon us, and we ¹ shall be saved.

⁴O LORD ¹ God of hosts,
how long will your anger fume when your ¹ people pray? **R**

⁵You have fed them with the ¹ bread of tears;
you have given them bowls of ¹ tears to drink.

⁶You have made us the derision ¹ of our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh ¹ us to scorn.

⁷Restore us, O ¹ God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we ¹ shall be saved.

¹⁷Let your hand be upon the one at ¹ your right hand,
the one you have made so strong ¹ for yourself. **R**

¹⁸And so will we never turn a- ¹ way from you;
give us life, that we may call up- ¹ on your name.

¹⁹Restore us, O LORD ¹ God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we ¹ shall be saved. **R**

As the Christians in Corinth await the advent of Jesus, Paul reminds them how the Lord has already enriched them through spiritual gifts and will continue to strengthen them until the coming day of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶just as the testimony of Christ

has been strengthened among you—⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel

Mark 13:24-37

Jesus encourages his followers to look forward to the day when he returns in power and glory to end all suffering.

[Jesus said:] “In those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give
its light,

²⁵and the stars will be falling
from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will
be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

God of power and might, tear open the heavens and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

A brief silence.

We pray for the ministry we share in Christ's name. Open our hearts to your call for justice, peace, and healing. Attune us to the needs of the world as you draw near. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for this planet in need of restoration: for devastated habitats, polluted waters, thawing ice, blazing fires, swelling floods, and long-lasting droughts. Renew the face of the earth and our relationship to it. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for all people who care for others in our community and around the world. Fill them with compassion and the power to respond with justice for those who are oppressed, with welcome for those who are excluded, and with relief for those who suffer. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for people who are in crisis as the seasons change: for those without homes facing severe weather, for those who are unemployed or underemployed, and for those in poverty or facing food insecurity. (*Local feeding or housing ministries may be named*). Relieve their burdens, sustain their bodies, and ease their minds. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for the people in our families and congregation who live with depression, anxiety, chronic pain, addiction, and other invisible illnesses (*especially*). Ease their suffering and support them when they struggle. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We give thanks for the lives and witness of those who died while waiting for justice, peace, or healing, those whose names we know and those whose names are known only to you. Sustain all who still yearn for the completion of your redeeming work. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday (Andrew, Apostle) John 1:35-42. **Tuesday** Revelation 18:1-10. **Wednesday** Micah 5:1-5a. **Thursday** (commemoration of Francis Xavier, missionary to Asia, 1552) Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13. **Friday** (commemoration of John of Damascus, theologian and hymnwriter, c. 749) Jeremiah 1:4-10. **Saturday** Ezekiel 36:24-28. **Second Sunday of Advent** (commemoration of Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, c. 342) Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8.

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