Teaching the Liturgical Year: First Week of Advent

A Reading from the Gospel of Mark 13:33–37: Need for Watchfulness

Jesus said to his disciples: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

Focus Questions

1. What did Jesus warn His disciples to do? Why?

2. In the parable that Jesus tells, what do the servants and gatekeeper need to do? Why?

3. The Latin root of the word Advent means “coming.” Why do you think this is a good Gospel reading for the first week of Advent?

4. What are some ways that you prepare for Christmas? What traditions do you and your family have?
God prepared His people for the coming of the Messiah for many centuries. In fact, it can be said that God began to prepare for the Savior’s coming from the very beginning. God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, to live in perfect harmony with Him in the Garden of Eden. They were made to know and love God as Father, and to be loved by Him. But, because of the temptation of the serpent, Adam and Eve sinned. They turned away from God’s love and brought sin and death into the world. Even though God allowed Adam and Eve to experience the consequences of their sin, He immediately promised them that they would be saved from their sin one day. God promised a Savior!

God’s promised salvation did not happen right away, however. In fact, sin had so badly wounded the human race that God had to prepare us to receive our salvation. And so, gradually, by word and deed, God worked in human history to move us ever closer to the fullness of relationship with Him that He so desired.

Then, at the appointed time, God sent His only, beloved Son to earth. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity assumed a human nature and became man in the Person of Jesus Christ. Born on Christmas Day in a stable in a small town called Bethlehem to a virgin named Mary, God became like us in all things but sin. Fully God and fully man, Jesus Christ taught us how to be holy and showed us the greatness of the Father’s love for us. And then He gave His life for us on the Cross. He suffered and died to make up for our sins. Then He rose from the dead. Our God died for us and defeated death, opening the gate of Heaven to us. Our salvation had come!

Today, and over the centuries, the Catholic Church has celebrated the coming of our Savior at Christmas. And like all those who waited and prepared for the coming of our Savior for the thousands of years before He came on the first Christmas, the Church today takes a moment to wait and to prepare. We call this time Advent. Advent is a season in the life of the Church in which we prepare our hearts to receive Christ and the salvation He offers us. It is a time to draw close to God, to reflect on all that He has done for us, and to be thankful for all the blessings He has given us. It is a time to pray to God, to talk
to Him, and to allow Him to speak to us. It is a time to follow the example of Christ in a special way and to serve others, especially those who are sick, suffering, or in need. It is a time to make room in our hearts and lives for Christ to come and dwell with us.

During Advent, we not only prepare for the coming of Christ as a child at Christmas, but we look forward to His promised Second Coming. Even though our salvation has already been won by Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, those of us alive today are not unlike those who lived thousands of years ago. Just as they awaited the first coming of the Savior, we await His Second Coming at the end of time. Then, all things will be made new. Then, if we have lived holy lives by loving God above all else, and loving our neighbor as ourselves, we will be welcomed into the eternal life He has promised and offered us from the very beginning.

Focus Questions

1. Why did God promise to send the Messiah?
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Why did God’s promised salvation not happen right away?
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3. Whom did God send to save us? What are three things He did?
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___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. What is Advent? What are two things we do during Advent?
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___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. What else do we prepare for during the Advent season?
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Waiting

Directions: In the space below, describe or draw a picture of a time when you had to wait for something good to happen. Why were you waiting? What was it like to have to wait? What did you do to pass the time? How did you prepare for what you were waiting for? How did you feel after you were done waiting?
Advent Poem

Directions: Write an acrostic poem using the letters in the word Advent. Each statement of your poem should describe something about Advent or Christmas.

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D

V

E

T
Symbols of Advent

Advent Wreath and Candles

The Advent wreath began as a way for families to reflect on the meaning of Advent in their homes. Today, most Catholic churches use an Advent wreath during their celebration of the Advent season. The wreath is usually made of evergreen branches formed into a circle. The circle represents eternal life. The green color of the wreath represents hope. It is a symbol of our hope for salvation and eternal life that Christ won for us on the Cross.

The wreath is decorated with four candles, one for each week of Advent. One candle is lit on the Sunday at the beginning of each week of Advent. The first two candles and the fourth candle are usually purple. Purple is a color of penance. It represents sorrow for our sins. The third candle is pink. This represents rejoicing because our Savior is coming soon. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, which is called Gaudete Sunday, or Rejoice Sunday. The light from the lit candles represents Jesus, who is the Light of the World.
Jesse Tree

Jesse was the father of King David. The prophet Isaiah wrote that “a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom” (11:1). Isaiah was writing about the family tree of King David. Centuries before the birth of Christ, Isaiah foretold that our Savior would be a descendant of King David. He would be the one who would save us from sin and fulfill all of God’s promises.

The Jesse Tree is similar to a Christmas tree, but it is not a Christmas tree. In fact, the tradition of decorating a tree for winter holidays predates Christianity! Early Christians borrowed the idea and created the Jesse Tree in order to make the practice more Christian. During Advent, a tree is decorated with ornaments that represent the important events and people in Salvation History that prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. Each week new ornaments are added to the tree to help tell the story of how God prepared His people to receive the salvation that He promised.
Advent Calendar

An Advent calendar is a way to mark each passing day of the Advent season. The Advent calendar usually has small doors or windows that are opened each day of advent. Behind each door is an image of Jesus; a small gift, such as a toy or candy; a Scripture passage for reflection; or an activity to do for each day of Advent. One by one, the doors are opened on the calendar until Christmas Eve, when the celebration of Christmas begins.
Ornament Template