Sermon 2026 Advent 1
November 29, 2026
Text: Mark 13:24-37
Theme: He is Coming

He is coming. How you feel about that depends on who "he" is and your relationship with him. If I say Santa Clause is coming to town and you have been nice, you're excited! If you're on the naughty list, you would be complacent at best. He might be coming but it won't have anything to do with you except to stock up on your coal supply. When you were a child and your mother said, "Wait until your father gets home." Likewise, if you had been on your best behavior and knew that Daddy always brought you a present from wherever he had traveled, you would be filled with hopeful anticipation. On the other hand, if you had been beastly during his absence and he was the disciplinarian, you might well be shaking with apprehension of his arrival.

On this day, the first Sunday in Advent, we proclaim, "He is coming!" We know who "he" is. He is Jesus Christ, the son of the living God who has promised to return for us on the last day to take us to the place in paradise that he has already prepared for us. And we know our relationship with him. He died on the cross to pay for our sins. We literally cannot be on the naughty list because he already paid for every sin we commit. Unlike Santa Clause and our earthly fathers, how we feel about Jesus coming is not based on our choices or our behavior but upon our relationship with the living son of God. We rejoice at his coming because we know that he loves us and brings us everything that is good and wonderful.

Today we begin a new Church year, and we remember first that unlike the calendar year, the Church year is different. The Church begins with the first Sunday in Advent and ends with the Last Sunday of the Church Year. The cycle always begins with remembering the return of Christ to which we look forward and for which we long. We light candles, one each Sunday, until the celebration of his first coming, the Nativity of Our Lord.

This, the first Sunday in Advent we light the Hope Candle which symbolizes the anticipation of the Messiah and the hope found in Old Testament prophecies. We hope in that we look forward to something certain.

The second Sunday in Advent, we light the Peace Candle which represents the peace Christ brings to our lives even in the swirling chaos of the end times in which we live where nuclear bombs threaten our existence, where little children sleep hungry in the streets and the mentally ill and generally unhinged are left to their own devices, burning cars, throwing bricks through store windows and demanding that everyone affirm their delusions.

The third Sunday in Advent, we light the Joy Candle which is pink and marks Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete is Latin for Joy and is intended to be a break from the "end of the world" themes with which we have been wrestling since early November. Gaudete is a joyful break as we look forward to the light of Christ coming into a darkened world, and we know that everything wrong will soon be righted and everything evil will be washed away.

The fourth Sunday in Advent, we light the Love Candle, which celebrates the love of God revealed through the birth of Jesus. We hear Jesus' birth foretold that day as the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and announces the good news that she will be the mother of the savior.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day we light the Christ Candle, placed in the center of the wreath, symbolizing Christ as the light of the world. And in the remembering of his first coming we celebrate his second coming. He did it once, exactly as he promised he would come, a baby of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, born under a star that marked his spot. He will do it again. Jesus promised us in the Gospel according to Mark,

"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power

and glory. And then 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."

It will not be a secret coming or a quiet coming, such as the Jehovah Witnesses teach. There will be no need for a pope or a prophet to interpret for you what is happening. On that day, the fourth day of creation will be reversed and the one who gave us light will darken the sun, moon, and stars. We will all see him coming in great power and glory. We, of course, will be overjoyed because of the relationship we have with him. We know that the day for which we have so longed has finally arrived. We know that the one who died for us has returned for us. We have lit all the candles waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom and we will stand in awe, eyes wide open and mouths agape, we will see the angels come for us and the Christ candle is lit. Gigantic beings called angels, messengers of God, will be sweeping across the earth gathering all of us who had faith in their master. Across all the earth they will fly, gathering the household of God, the elect, into Heaven while the earth is destroyed in fire.

No one knows the day or the hour, but there is no doubting that the time is coming. Look at our world. Millions of babies are being legally murdered every year. Human beings are being surgically altered, trying to change their bodies to placate their mental illness. War after war destroys human lives and even more lives are destroyed by drugs, alcohol, obesity, and pornography. As the end draws closer, human beings loudly vocalize the justification for their sinful indulgences, and we're not even supposed to call them out as sinful anymore. That's just not acceptable in polite society.

The end is near. When is it? Who cares? If you die tonight, it is today for you. That's Jesus' point. This is not something to put on your calendar for next year. This is something for which to be prepared every moment of every day.

"Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

It is a joyous day for us when we see him coming. It is not so joyous for those whose faith is dead. So we have from now until then for the Holy Spirit to breathe life into them. We have from now until then to feed them the Word, invite them to worship and pray for them continuously. Stay awake. We have the most precious gift in the world to give away, and Satan's only hope is to lull us to sleep with his mind-numbing temptations and distractions.

Stay awake. As the candles of Advent are lit remember what we hope for, why we have peace as we hope, how we have joy in the midst of disaster and who loves us beyond our capability to grasp. Our brother is coming home for us soon and we want everyone to join us in the banquet.