

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

ADVENT CANDLES

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Be prepared (Matthew 24: 36-44)

The Gospel reading to begin the season of Advent is part of Matthew's adaptation of chapter 13 of Mark's Gospel, the Apocalyptic Discourse, about the last days. The whole of Matthew 24 is stimulated by the disciples' question, put privately to Jesus, 'What will be the sign of your coming at the end of the age?' There are two parts to the answer given to this question in the present passage. The first part is that no one knows when the end will come. The second part is that the disciples must be awake and prepared for Jesus' coming at any time.

The image to stimulate reflection on being awake and prepared during Advent for Jesus' coming is *advent candles*.

Core extract from the Gospel (Matthew 24: 42-44; for reflection throughout the week)

Jesus spoke to his disciples:

'Keep awake, therefore,
for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
But understand this:
if the owner of the house had known
in what part of the night the thief was coming,
he would have stayed awake
and would not have let his house be broken into.
Therefore you also must be ready,
for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
we look forward to your birth at Christmas.
Let your light shine in our hearts
and drive away all darkness from our lives,
so that we are ready to welcome you;
for your name's sake.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Matthew 24: 36-44

The Necessity for Watchfulness

Jesus said to his disciples, 'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Matthew 24: 36-44)

Begin to explore Matthew's teaching about being awake and prepared for the Son of man's coming at any time by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- What do you understand by Matthew's reference to the days of Noah?
- What do you understand by the term 'Son of Man'?
- Why is Matthew warning his readers about one being taken and one left?
- Why is Matthew warning his readers about the thief in the night?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore how Matthew draws on part of Mark 13 and adds new material.

- Mark 13: 31 and Matthew 24: 35

Explore how Luke uses similar material in a different context.

- Luke 12: 39-40
- Luke 17: 26-27
- Luke 17: 35

Explore the tradition about Noah in the Old Testament.

- Genesis 7: 7-16

Explore similar refrains in Matthew.

- Matthew 24: 27
- Matthew 25: 13
- Matthew 26: 41

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Exploring online

Widen your exploration of Matthew's teaching about being awake and prepared for the Son of Man's coming at any time by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- Son of Man in Matthew
- Origin of Advent candles
- The five Advent candles

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on the Gospel reading appointed for Advent Sunday is *Advent candles*. Draw on your experience of Advent candles. For example:

- What has been your experience of Advent candles in church?
- What has been your experience of keeping awake to keep watch?
- What has been your experience of using Advent candles at home?

What have you learned about Advent candles?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Matthew's teaching about being awake and prepared for the Son of Man's coming at any time or by the image of Advent candles.

- Make a stand on which to place your Advent candle.
- Make a poster illustrating different sorts of Advent candles.
- Make an Advent collage of images from today's Gospel reading.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of staying awake to keep watch or on the image of Advent candles.



EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



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