

First Sunday of Advent

Prayer

God of holy surprises,
you come like dawn breaking through the night,
like a whisper of hope in weary hearts,
like a sudden knock at the door.

Keep us awake to your presence among us.
Let our waiting be active,
our hoping be courageous,
our love be generous.

When fear clouds our vision,
shine the light of your peace.
When weariness weighs us down,
lift us with your Spirit's breath.
When injustice seems unshakable,
strengthen us to stand, to speak, to act.

Come, Emmanuel,
and make all things new –
in our lives, in our communities,
and in your world that longs for healing.

Watching and Waiting

Advent begins with stillness and attention. The readings call us to awaken to hope, to notice how promise stirs within uncertainty. This opening movement of the season sets a tone of quiet expectancy, drawing us towards trust, patience, and readiness. We are invited to watch for the subtle signs of renewal already taking shape. Images of dawn, candlelight, and footsteps beginning a journey speak of faith waiting in motion.

Threads to explore

- Attentiveness to hope in uncertain times
- The slow, patient work of trust
- Light emerging through darkness
- Beginning again with courage and grace

Context

Isaiah 2 was first spoken into a time of fear and instability for God's people, surrounded by threats from powerful nations. Against the background of war and uncertainty, Isaiah offers a daring vision of peace where weapons are repurposed into tools of life. This context reminds us that Advent hope does not arise from comfort, but from the courage to imagine God's future in the midst of struggle.

Connections

The lectionary this week ties together a call to wakefulness. Isaiah dreams of a world at peace; Paul urges the church to live as people clothed in God's light; and Jesus warns his followers to stay alert. Each reading resists passivity and invites us into active readiness for God's reign of justice and peace.

Deepening the Word

Advent opens with an invitation to live as though God's future is already reshaping the present. The call to "keep awake" is not about relentless alertness but about noticing where compassion and quiet transformation are already stirring. Isaiah's vision of weapons turned into tools for nurture imagines a world where harm is dismantled and life is tended with care. Paul's language of waking to light invites a renewed awareness of God's nearness, without judgement for those who feel weary or overwhelmed.

Hope grows when communities practise it together. Liberation and inclusion theologies remind us that God's future becomes visible wherever people work to create spaces of dignity and belonging: queer communities cultivating joy and chosen family; disabled people and allies reshaping settings to be accessible for all; congregations confronting racism and nurturing cultures of welcome; neighbourhood groups organising for safety, housing, or mutual care. These are not examples of marginalised people carrying the weight of change, but of communities choosing justice and tenderness together. Advent honours these collective movements toward life.

Be mindful that imagery of watchfulness may be difficult for those living with trauma, exhaustion, depression, or chronic vigilance. Let wakefulness be framed as invitation, not pressure: a gentle turning toward the light that comes to meet us with compassion.

Discussion

Matthew 24:36–44

This passage is often read with anxiety – about judgment, about the end of time, about being "caught unprepared." But notice: Jesus isn't calling for fear. He is calling for attentiveness. Advent begins with the challenge to stay awake: not through frantic activity, but through faithful living. "Keeping awake" is less about watching the clock and more about seeing the world

clearly – so we can act with love, justice, and readiness for God’s presence here and now.

Questions:

- What feelings arise when you hear Jesus’ words about being ready? Fear? Hope? Uncertainty?
- What might ‘keeping awake’ look like in everyday life – especially when it comes to fairness and justice?
- How do these readings together encourage you to live as a person of peace and light?
- What helps you get ready to live God’s way in daily life?
- Where do you notice people ignoring unfairness or hurt? What gentle things could help them notice and care?
- How does this passage challenge or encourage you personally in the way you live each day?

Call to Worship

Awake from sleep: the dawn is near.

Lay aside fear: the Light is coming.

Come, people of God, let us walk in the way of peace.

Adoration

God of dawn and promise,

you are the One who holds the future in your hands.

The night is long, yet you whisper of a coming day.

We adore you as the One who does not forget your people,

who enters our restless world with peace,

who awakens us with hope when despair feels strong.

You are the God who walks with the refugee,
who shares the table with the hungry,
who brings healing to the broken.
You come not with weapons or wealth,
but with presence, tenderness, and truth.
In awe and gratitude, we lift our hearts to you,
our God who is always coming,
always new, always near.

Confession

Holy One,
we confess that we have been lulled into apathy.
We sleepwalk through injustice,
ignoring the cries of those who long for freedom.
We protect our comfort
while others are left outside in the cold.
We cling to what is familiar
instead of preparing space for your reign of peace.

Forgive us when we close our eyes to suffering,
when we silence voices that disturb us,
when we resist your transforming Spirit.
Wake us, renew us,
and clothe us with your grace.
Give us courage to live as children of light
and to be ready for the day of Christ's coming.

Intercessions

God of justice and mercy,
we bring before you the needs of the world.
We pray for all who are weary from waiting –
refugees seeking safety,
families longing for shelter,

workers denied fair wages,
communities living under oppression.

We pray for peace where violence rages,
for hope where despair is deep,
for leaders to seek the good of all people,
and for your Church to live as a sign of the coming dawn.

We remember those we love and those who love us,
those who carry burdens we cannot see,
those who need strength to keep going today.

Come quickly, God of love,
and set your world free.
Make us partners in your work of healing,
agents of your peace,
and witnesses to your justice.

Thanksgiving

Generous God,
we thank you for the gift of this new season of Advent –
for its reminder that even in the longest night,
your light cannot be extinguished.

We thank you for the promise of a world remade in your image,
for glimpses of your reign already breaking through:
acts of kindness, courage for justice,
movements for peace,
communities that practise radical welcome.

We thank you for Christ who comes among us,
for the Spirit who stirs within us,
for love that will not let us go.
All glory and honour be yours,

for you are faithful,
and your mercy endures forever.

Blessing

May the God of light awaken you,
the Christ of peace walk beside you,
and the Spirit of hope guide you into each new day.

Visual

- Place an alarm clock on the communion table or at the centre of the gathering as a symbol of wakefulness.
- Use candles or lanterns to create a pathway leading into the worship space, symbolising the journey from darkness into light.
- Display a hammer and gardening tools as a sign of Isaiah's vision of weapons turned into life-giving instruments.

Creative

- **Advent Watch:** Set an alarm each day this week at an unexpected time. When it rings, pause for a minute to notice the world around you, pray for those who suffer, and ask God to keep you alert to signs of hope.
- **Hammer & Anvil Prayer:** Provide paper and pens. Write down "weapons" (habits, systems, fears) that harm life. In silence, tear the paper into strips, and then on a new sheet write what tool of peace it could become.
- **Create a Path of Light:** Invite each person to place a candle or lantern in a darkened space during prayer, forming a pathway of light. As the lights grow, reflect on how small acts of faithfulness

bring God's dawn closer.

- **Walking in the Light:** Organise a short walk at dawn or dusk. During the walk, stay silent for a time, noticing the transition of light. Afterwards, share reflections on what it means to "walk in the light of God" (Isaiah 2:5).
- **Hope Stones:** Provide small stones and markers. Invite people to write or draw a word of hope or a symbol of peace. Stones can be carried as reminders during the week, or gathered into a shared pile in worship as a symbol of the community's readiness to build peace together.
- **Daily Light Journal:** Encourage people to keep a simple Advent journal. Each day, write down one moment when they noticed "light" – a kindness, a sign of hope, or an act of justice. Share selected entries in a group session or during worship later in Advent.

Meditation

Based on Isaiah 2:1–5

Take a moment to be still.

Notice your breath, your body, your presence here.

Allow yourself to rest in God's presence.

Now imagine a great mountain rising in the distance.

People of every nation are turning towards it –
coming together, each in their own way.

Some are moving swiftly, some slowly,
some are carried, some are guiding others.

All are drawn by the same call:

"Come, let us live in God's ways."

At the mountain's heart, you hear words of peace.

Weapons are laid down and reshaped –

swords turned into ploughs, spears into pruning hooks.
 Tools for harm are becoming tools for growth.
 Conflict gives way to nourishment.

Pause here.

Where do you see violence or fear in your own life,
 in your community, in our world?
 Imagine those sharp edges softened,
 those divisions remade into bonds of care.

Now picture yourself among the crowd,
 moving in your own way, at your own pace,
 into the light that shines from God.
 It is a light of peace, a light of justice,
 a light that gathers every person, every body, every story.

Stay with this light.
 Let it surround you.
 Let it guide you.
 Let it remind you that you are part of God's vision –
 a world where all can live together in peace.

When you are ready, return gently,
 carrying this vision of light and peace within you.

Performance

A modern letter inspired by Romans 13:11–14

Dear friends,

It's later than we think. The night has dragged on, but dawn is nearer than ever. I know how easy it is to get comfortable in the dark – to pull the blanket back over our heads, to say, “just a little longer.” But the alarm is ringing. It's time to wake up.

Don't stumble out into the world half-asleep. Get dressed for the day. Not in the clothes of greed, fear, or envy – they don't fit anymore. Instead, wrap yourself in the garments of Christ: compassion that refuses to let go, courage that stands up to injustice, love that protects the most vulnerable.

The world needs light-bringers. You don't need to shine perfectly – even a small flame is enough to push back the shadows. So rise, friends. Put on the light. The day is here.

With urgency and hope,
Your companion in Christ

Practice

Staying awake to hope

Each day this week, pause for a few minutes to notice where hope is quietly alive.

You might be on a bus, in a ward, at a desk, in a queue, or at home. You can sit, stand, lie down, or move around. Keep your eyes open or closed – whatever feels safest.

Breathe in gently and say in your heart: “Awaken me to hope.”
Breathe out and say: “Help me to stay open.”

Look back over the last day or the last few hours. Notice one moment where you glimpsed courage, kindness, truth-telling, or patient perseverance – in yourself, in others, or in the wider world. Hold that moment before God with gratitude.

If it helps, jot it down or share it with someone you trust. Let these small moments become signposts that keep you awake to God's quiet work around you.

Digital

- Share a photo of a candle or light in the dark with the caption: “Where have you noticed light today?”
- Post a question: “What small act of hope can you offer this week?”
- Use a simple Advent hashtag (e.g., #WakeUpToHope) and encourage others to share signs of light in their daily lives.
- Create a daily reminder post (short text or image) with the words: “Stay awake. Look for light.” Invite others to repost it.
- Invite people to share a wake-up playlist – songs that inspire courage, hope, or joy – under a shared Advent theme.

Explore

Advent can feel unusual for people who are new to faith. The readings speak about *wakefulness* and *light*, which can sound mysterious until they connect with everyday life. Advent isn’t about waiting for something far away; it’s about noticing hope and goodness already close by. Keep things simple and open – this season is about awareness, not fear. It’s a chance to be curious and to look for light in ordinary places.

Discover

- The prophets spoke words of hope when people were afraid and uncertain.
- Isaiah’s vision shows God’s dream of peace, where tools help life to grow instead of causing harm.
- Paul reminds us that God’s light helps people live kindly and bravely.

- Jesus calls everyone to stay awake – to notice where love and goodness are already around us.
- Advent begins a new church year and invites us to make space for hope and renewal.

Reflect

Advent begins with a call to stay awake – not through worry, but by paying attention to what matters most. These readings remind us that light still breaks through the world's weariness. Faith often starts with small awakenings: moments of kindness, courage, or beauty that surprise us. The invitation is to stay open to love's arrival – already nearer than we imagine.

Connect

You might recognise that same light in everyday life: a friendly smile, a word of comfort, or a quiet act of care. Each small sign of goodness reminds us that hope is alive and active in the world.

Think

- What helps you notice light and goodness during your day?
- When have you felt encouraged or comforted by someone's kindness?

Do

Choose a regular time – when you wake, share a meal, or go outside – to pause and ask: *Where did I glimpse light today?* If you like, jot down a few notes or take a photo of something that lifted your heart. Over time, these moments show how faith begins to grow.