



Preparing to Proclaim

Key words and phrases: “[S]tay awake! . . . you also must be prepared.”

To the point: Even for those of us who believe in observing Advent before Christmas, the secular world’s insistence on rushing to the latter can form our expectations. When Advent begins, we come to Mass ready for flickering flame, for slowly growing light, for tidings of comfort and joy. But this gospel snaps us back to reality: it is not Christmas yet. What is described here is rather scary and unsettling. The image of people being sud-

denly taken away is uncomfortable; the idea of being left behind doesn’t sound great either. All this reminds us that our God is a God of surprises. For most of us, God’s surprising work will be much more ordinary than vanishing neighbors, but we are still called to stay aware of God’s presence and open to the unexpected ways God moves in our hearts and in our world.

Making Connections

Between the readings: Compared to the gospel, the first reading offers a more comforting and joyful vision of the end times. There is unity and inclusion rather than division; all are called to be part of the lasting peace God envisions for us. The psalmist echoes the joy of the nations streaming toward Jerusalem as he, too, heads there on pilgrimage and prays for its peace. The second reading gives us practical ways to “stay awake,” through moral conduct and union with Christ.

To experience: “Staying awake” means remaining attentive to how small choices build into robust lives of faith. It means cultivating awareness of God’s ongoing presence in the mundane realities of our lives. It means turning our attention toward the things that really matter and turning away from things that are distracting. Advent might be an invitation to shake off the stupor of binge watching and social media scrolling and to enter into the fully vibrant lives that God wants for us.

Prayer

God of Heaven and Earth,
you long to be our God; we long to draw near
to you.

Show unto us the path to your holy city,
that all may cry out with joy:
“Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.”
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

First Reading (Isa 2:1-5)

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah
This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz,
saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come,
the mountain of the LORD’s house
shall be established as the highest
mountain
and raised above the hills.

All nations shall stream toward it;
many peoples shall come and say:
“Come, let us climb the LORD’s mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths.”

For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from
Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,
and impose terms on many peoples.

They shall beat their swords into
plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
one nation shall not raise the sword against
another,
nor shall they train for war again.

O house of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Pronunciation

Amoz AY-muhz
Judah JOU-duh
Zion ZAI-uhn

Good times are coming!
All nations are going to
enjoy the prosperity! All
war will end with imple-
ments of war being
beaten into tools to culti-
vate the land to support
life rather than destroy
life.

Try a pause after “nor
shall they train for war
again.” Then really pro-
claim: “O house of Jacob,
come . . .!”

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9)

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced because they said to me,
 “We will go up to the house of the LORD.”
 And now we have set foot
 within your gates, O Jerusalem.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Jerusalem, built as a city
 with compact unity.
 To it the tribes go up,
 the tribes of the LORD.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

According to the decree for Israel,
 to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
 In it are set up judgment seats,
 seats for the house of David.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
 May those who love you prosper!
 May peace be within your walls,
 prosperity in your buildings.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Because of my brothers and friends
 I will say, “Peace be within you!”
 Because of the house of the LORD, our God,
 I will pray for your good.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Second Reading (Rom 13:11-14)

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:
 You know the time;
 it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep.

Try being very measured in your delivery of the first two lines emphasizing the word *know*. Then after “You *know* the time”—you tell them what it is time to do!

For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed;

the night is advanced, the day is at hand.

Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light;

let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day,

not in orgies and drunkenness,

not in promiscuity and lust,

not in rivalry and jealousy.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.

Gospel (Matt 24:37-44; LIA)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said to his disciples:

“As it was in the days of Noah,
so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

In those days before the flood,
they were eating and drinking,
marrying and giving in marriage,
up to the day that Noah entered the ark.

They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away.

So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man.

Two men will be out in the field;
one will be taken, and one will be left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill;
one will be taken, and one will be left.

Therefore, stay awake!

For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming,

After the orgies, etc., which can be a bit embarrassing to read and hear, enjoy a nice pause and then say with great thoughtfulness, “But put on . . .”

Try taking a longer than usual three-to-four-second pause after “A reading from the holy Gospel . . .” This is a technique used by great speakers to really arrest the listeners’ attention.

Matthew is obviously drawing a parallel here between those caught unaware in the flood and those who will be caught unprepared for the coming of the Son of Man. Terrifying, isn’t it? Allow a pause for listeners to ask, what shall we do? The answer follows: “Therefore, stay awake!” Be ready always!

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

he would have stayed awake
and not let his house be broken into.
So too, you also must be prepared,
for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of
Man will come.”

Preparing to Proclaim

Key words and phrases: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

To the point: This week’s gospel introduces one of Advent’s main characters: John the Baptist. And he is treated as a character here, given a more vivid description than many biblical figures. We are meant to picture him; we know what he wears and what he eats. He is rough. He is unkempt. He is blunt. He is, in a word, weird. And yet, people are drawn to him, listening to his preaching and going to be baptized. Throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons, we hear stories of God coming in ways we didn’t expect, from this bizarre desert preacher to a literal infant born into poverty. In John the Baptist, holiness could have been overlooked because of his oddities. But the season insists on reminding us to keep our eyes open to the truth that God often comes disguised in interruption and inconvenience.



Making Connections

Between the readings: Again, a harsh-sounding gospel is paired with an Old Testament prophecy of lush comfort. At the same time, though, it echoes the gospel’s promise that Jesus is not coming to bring peace alone; those who are unrepentantly wicked or ruthless should be afraid of his coming. The second reading affirms that Christ’s coming is for all; it is not our background or origin that matters but our choice to follow Jesus.

To experience: Recognizing that God works through the interruptions of our lives is an ongoing challenge. Very often we are tempted to think we know best, especially if we have included God in our discernment and the making of our plans. But our plans—even the ones that seem good and holy—are up for interruption. Convenience is not a prerequisite for how God works. Prophets often appear in our midst in weird and inconvenient ways. They are there for a reason; they interrupt our too-small ways of understanding God. How often do we overlook prophets in our midst?

Prayer

God of the Lowly and Poor,
we await the coming of your son, Jesus,
who shall make everything whole.
*Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness
of peace forever.*

May he come to us quickly, without delay,
he who is compassion and mercy.

Amen.

Pronunciation

Gentiles JEHN-tailz

Have you ever had a plant that you thought was dead and then one day you spot a beautiful green shoot making an appearance? Wow! This is the kind of excitement with which you can deliver the first line.

With the arrival of this new being, the order of the world will change for the better.

First Reading (Isa 11:1-10)

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the
stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:
a spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
a spirit of counsel and of strength,
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the
LORD,
and his delight shall be the fear of the
LORD.

Not by appearance shall he judge,
nor by hearsay shall he decide,
but he shall judge the poor with justice,
and decide aright for the land's afflicted.
He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his
mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay
the wicked.

Justice shall be the band around his waist,
and faithfulness a belt upon his hips.
Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the young lion shall browse
together,
with a little child to guide them.
The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,
together their young shall rest;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.

The baby shall play by the cobra's den,
and the child lay his hand on the adder's
lair.

There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy
mountain;
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge
of the LORD,
as water covers the sea.

On that day, the root of Jesse,
set up as a signal for the nations,
the Gentiles shall seek out,
for his dwelling shall be glorious.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17)

R. (cf. 7) Justice shall flourish in his time, and
fullness of peace for ever.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
he shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and
fullness of peace for ever.

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no
more.

May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and
fullness of peace for ever.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to
help him.

He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and
fullness of peace for ever.

May his name be blessed forever;
as long as the sun his name shall remain.
In him shall all the tribes of the earth be
blessed;
all the nations shall proclaim his happiness.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and
fullness of peace for ever.

Pronunciation

Gentiles JEHN-tailz

This reading is a pretty straightforward one for St. Paul. Nevertheless, read through it a number of times and out loud, if at all possible. Readings should never be done “fast.”

Paul often writes in a declarative voice, as in this case. Try delivering this in a very determined manner.

Second Reading (Rom 15:4-9)

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:
Whatever was written previously was written
for our instruction,
that by endurance and by the
encouragement of the Scriptures
we might have hope.

May the God of endurance and
encouragement
grant you to think in harmony with one
another,
in keeping with Christ Jesus,
that with one accord you may with one
voice
glorify the God and Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, then, as Christ
welcomed you,
for the glory of God.

For I say that Christ became a minister of the
circumcised
to show God’s truthfulness,
to confirm the promises to the patriarchs,
but so that the Gentiles might glorify God
for his mercy.

As it is written:

*Therefore, I will praise you among the
Gentiles
and sing praises to your name.*

Gospel (Matt 3:1-12; L4A)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said:
*A voice of one crying out in the desert,
 Prepare the way of the LORD,
 make straight his paths.*

John wore clothing made of camel’s hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers!

Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.

And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’

For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Pronunciation

Judea jou-DEE-uh
 Pharisees FEHR-ih-seez
 Sadducees SAD-joo-seez

What a wonderfully theatrical writing (in the best sense) we have been given here! At the beginning you are describing one of the Bible’s most colorful prophets—one who I don’t think I would like to meet in a dark alley by myself! Yet the people are flocking to him; it’s amazing.

Notice that there is arguably a crescendo in this reading. It begins gently, albeit not without substance, and builds straight through to the last line. Don’t be afraid to give this reading the same energy that John the Baptist would.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

I am baptizing you with water, for repentance,
but the one who is coming after me is
mightier than I.

I am not worthy to carry his sandals.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and
fire.

His winnowing fan is in his hand.
He will clear his threshing floor
and gather his wheat into his barn,
but the chaff he will burn with
unquenchable fire.”