

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – First Sunday of Advent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 24:36-44

Happy New Church Year! The Gospel according to Matthew will be our main guidebook through Year A. Matthew appears to have had a hunch that the Son of Man's expected return just might be taking a bit longer than expected. Matthew helps us figure out how to live — as we celebrate the birth and life of Jesus and await his coming again. One thing Matthew is very clear about: be ready!

The school year began months ago; New Year's Day is over a month away. Yet here we are, beginning our new Church year with the First Sunday of Advent. Advent invites us to risk pushing on through the world's weariness to expectant hope. Something's coming we proclaim! Immanuel: God With Us in the form of an infant. We celebrate what happened 2000 years ago while we look to the promise that Jesus will come again. We are also called, as we live in this parenthesis time, to look for messages God continues to send: what has happened, and will happen again, is also happening now: right here.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

Keep awake, for you do not know when Jesus is coming back. This message is not intended to cause us to cower in fear. Fear provides a useful warning signal, but it can also have the potential to paralyze us. Instead, we are called to the opposite of fear; we are called to faith.

Theme: Be Ready for Messages

Before Class: You will need copies of the Bible or of the scripture for today, a sheet of newsprint or other large sheet of paper, and a felt marker. You will also need enough sheets of paper and pencils or pens for each person in the class to have one.

Beginning: Ask the class to brainstorm with you the things that show up on our "To Do List" when we hear "Advent" as the season that precedes Christmas. You can scribe what is said. (The list will probably include Christmas cards, presents purchased, wrapped, shipped or hidden in the house; decorating the tree and the house; children's pageants and office Christmas parties.)

Then, ask the group to take a deep breath, change the focus from "gotta do" to what God might be calling us to do. Some idea starters you could offer: Could God be calling us to be gentler on ourselves, find spaces however brief to just be with God? Could it be that we are being called to "waste some time" just hanging out with our families? Could we turn off the TV one night a week, pop some popcorn and together watch a quality movie or read a good book; or take a drive around and enjoy the lights? Could our family identify a need in the community and reach out to them with gifts or even with visits?

Opening Prayer: Dear God, you call us to be ready because the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. Help us to choose our priorities, work through our fears and live our lives in expectant hope. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 24:36-44 Invite one person to read the entire passage while the rest of you listen and follow along. Keep a moment of silence at the conclusion of the reading.

Questions:

- I wonder what stood out for you in this passage.
- Name some of the “fears” in this passage that will have to be worked through. (Example: some will be taken and some will be left out, an unprotected house could well be ransacked, etc.)
- Since it is our understanding that the Gospel is Good News, let us find the messages of hope expressed in this passage. (Jesus is painstakingly describing how to “be ready;” some stayed awake so they were ready, etc.)

Option:

Invite each member of the group to take a sheet of paper and make three columns; entitle the three columns: **Data – Important – Expendable**. Ask them to list the items from our large list that apply as data to them (if they have no children, the children’s pageant will probably not surface) adding things they think of that were not on the list, if they want. Suggest they begin to think which of the two columns the data can be listed under – which things are really important (probably a Christmas tree, for example) and which are expendable (possibly baking, from scratch, several dozen cookies). Again priorities will be different in each family. Then, invite the class members to take these lists home and work on them with the other members of their families.

Option: (If any members of your class have young children and these optional lessons will be used in their class, alert the parents that the children will be making cards to give to harried grocery clerks, tired mail carriers, possibly even day care workers or shut-ins the family is aware of.) Discuss how “naming” the fear of this season gives us a jump on working through the fear.

Getting Closure: Since perhaps finding spaces of quiet, silence, emptiness may well be a part of “be ready” invite the group to spend a few moments in silence. Invite them to put aside “to do” lists, even intercessions, and “be.” Remind them that all kinds of thoughts will come to them. The idea is simply to notice the idea and let it go on by, returning to silence. A simple word, like “peace” or “Emmanuel” or “Jesus,” repeated silently can help hold the silence. After a time that seems appropriate to you, simply say “Amen,” to end the silence.

Closing Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you for your love for us, that you do not want us stuck in fear, and that you hold out to us the hope that accompanies our acceptance of your love. Amen.

Matthew 24:36-44

36 ‘But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But 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. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

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