

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.

37 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

38 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,

39 and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

40 Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.

41 Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

42 Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

43 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.

44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

“Advent: A Time to Live in Readiness”

Matthew 24: 36 – 44

November 30, 2025

La Habra UMC

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I am sure all of you have this kind of experience I am about to share.
When you ordered some services, such as, utility set up or internet service, UPS, or FedEx, or furniture delivery..., they give you the arrival in four-hour window during which the technician or the delivery would come, like 8 to noon or 1 to 5. You need to have a chunk of the day blocked out to wait:

That kind of waiting puts me under a lot of pressure:

I can't go anywhere.

I must make sure the house is in proper condition.

I need to eat my meal before or after that four-hour window

because I don't want be caught in the middle of my meal.

And I must dress properly... waiting!

I don't like it.

However, even four-hour windows are better than three-day window, or no window at all.

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This is the first Sunday in Advent, the beginning of the new year in the Christian calendar.

The Christian calendar is a vital component of Christian theology and worship, providing a framework for Christians to journey through the year in a way that is both meaningful and spiritually enriching.

Christian Calendar is divided by two big events, Christmas to celebrate the birth of Jesus and Easter, the resurrection of Jesus. And both of these important events have **The Preparation periods**,

- **Advent:** A season of preparation and anticipation leading up to Christmas, typically lasting four Sundays.
- **Lent:** A period of 40 days of fasting, reflection, and preparation for Easter, often marked by acts of penance and charity.

Today we start the four weeks of Advent:

Advent is the season of waiting, and this waiting has three dimensions:

1. **Advent Past**, or I simply call, “Advent Yesterday” is that waiting period before Christmas.
As we remember the stories we read and learned from the bible,
we prepare our hearts for the arrival of baby Jesus.
And we hope we can do it better this time, this year.
One of the examples can be....
We still remember Jesus was born in a manger, and try to make sure there is a room at the inn this year... prepare a proper room for the baby..... (Some of our projects reflect this effort.)
2. **Advent Future**, or I call it, “Advent Tomorrow” is about Jesus’ second coming. Several places in the Bible you read about Jesus promising his coming again. And on the scene of Ascension, (In the Book of Acts) after Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels reminded the apostles,
“‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’”

The second coming of Jesus Christ is the hope of believers that God is in control of all things and is faithful to the promises and prophecies in His Word.

This promise of second coming was very important, especially for those early disciples, and mostly audiences of the Matthew’s gospel. As you know, Matthew was primarily written for the Jewish Christians

who were living in the aftermath of the first century Jewish revolt. To demonstrate that Jesus was the promised Messiah Matthew referred to the Hebrew Bible, which we also call the Old Testament.

In His first coming, Jesus Christ came to earth as a baby in a manger. Jesus fulfilled many of the prophecies of the Messiah during His birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

However, there are some prophecies regarding the Messiah that Jesus has not yet fulfilled. The second coming of Christ will be the return of Christ to fulfill these remaining prophecies, they believed.

They also believed that in His first coming, Jesus was the Suffering Servant. In His second coming, Jesus would be the Conquering King. In His first coming, Jesus arrived in the humblest of circumstances. In His second coming, Jesus would arrive with the armies of heaven at His side, they believed.

By the time the Gospel of Matthew was written and read to the early churches, people became tired of waiting for Jesus' second coming. They thought he was going to return soon, but it stretched decades.

It is believed that Gospel Matthew was written between about A.D.¹ 55 to 90. That was some 20 to 60 years after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Perhaps many of those who had actually seen Jesus in person was already dead. And those who joined the early churches were those who did not have first – hand experience of Jesus. They heard about Jesus but wanted more concrete evidences of his miracles and teachings. People were anxious, and rumors of his return were popping up. So they had to be reminded as our scripture for today began with....

"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

3. Today, I'd like to focus on **Advent Present**, or I call it... **Advent Today**:

¹ *anno domini* ("in the year of the Lord"—the year Jesus was born).

Advent today is not a pause between Advent Yesterday and Advent Tomorrow filled with meaningless waiting. Advent today is the period of anticipation that as we learn from the Advent Yesterday, we also bring in the glimpses of Advent Tomorrow in our everyday life.

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Paul Tillich, a famous Christian theologian and teacher (1886 – 1965), a German-American who was one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century. Tillich taught at German universities before immigrating to the United States in 1933. And he taught at Union Theological Seminary (NY), Harvard University, and the University of Chicago. In his book The Shaking of the Foundations, he writes about waiting.

".... although waiting is not having, it is also having.

**The fact that we wait for something
shows that in some way we already possess it.**

Waiting anticipates that which is not yet real.

If we wait and hope in patience,

the power of that for which we wait is already effective within us.

He who waits in an ultimate sense

is not far from that for which he waits."

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To illustrate what the Second Coming would be like, Jesus tells us about the days of Noah—You can read about it in the 6th chapter of the Book of Genesis, a familiar story for many: The world was corrupt, but “Noah walked with God.” And before God destroyed the earth, God commanded Noah to build the ark, a seemingly useless task. Why would anyone build an ark on dry land? But Noah did, and you know the rest of the story: He and his family along with every pair of animals entered the ark and survived while everyone and everything else were drowned in the rain.

Noah is a great example of the Life of Advent Today.

- 1) He has the communication lines open with God. While living on the earth, along with others, managing his life on earth, he had one year open to God. Noah was living and planning life on another dimension, listening to God.

Noah’s story is not just about survival— it’s about being in tune with God,

trusting that small voice, living in faith, being obedient to God's leading when the whole world seems oblivious about that.

To live in Advent Today means focusing on the things beyond our own survival and desires. It is saving our resources and investing on the things beyond what the normal life on earth required. It is building something for life beyond the current one, while everyone else wonders why.

It is living beyond the needs of current life!!

- 2) Advent Today is not about living passively — To be living Advent Today, we actively follow what we are directed at even when it doesn't make sense.

Whatever we are being directed by that small voice, we actively work on it and wait. And what we don't understand will eventually make sense when in its own time when all the puzzle pieces are put together.

Living in Advent Today, if we pay attention, we may experience the presence of Christ.

Again, in Paul Tillick's words, "The fact that we wait for something shows that in some way we already possess it. Waiting anticipates that which is not yet real."

In Advent Today, we grasp these small pieces of Advent Tomorrow.

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On this first Sunday in Advent, we are invited to the Time to Live in Readiness.

So what do we wait for?

What do we dream about while waiting and living in Advent Today?

What "ark" is God asking you to build in your life today?

Let's pray for hearts that are both comforted and stirred, for the courage to examine our lives honestly, and for the grace to live each day as if the door might open and Christ Himself step in.

*“Like Noah, will you trust God enough to build your ark today?
Will you step into obedience, even when the world mocks?
Because when the floodwaters rise, only those who walk with God will stand.”*

Can we truly say we are living with open hands and ready hearts?

May the peace and challenge of Christ go with you.

Amen.