

THE ARRIVAL
Matthew 24:36-44

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Today marks the beginning of the season of Advent, a time of preparation.
What do we expect to happen? What do we anticipate?
A festive time with an endless stream of Christmas parties?
A feasting time with an over abundance of food?
A frosty time with snowmen and the arrival of Santa?
A fantastic time with presents under the tree?
A family time when we look forward to going home for the holidays?

PREDICTABLE SURPRISES

This is a season filled with foreseeable surprises.
We can predict the arrival of “economic first-degree murder.”
We anticipate suicidal traffic jams and endless check-out lines.
We know this marks the advent of holiday rage and seasonal depression.
We see the season as a prelude to disappointment.

THE FIRST ADVENT

It’s celebrating the beautiful birth of a baby in Bethlehem.
We see the signs: a Chrismon Tree, Nativity Scene, Banners, an Advent Wreath.
The message of Advent is not just, “Prepare the way of the Lord,” but also,
“Watch and wait!”
The greatest prediction I can give you is that Christ will surprise you when you
least expect it.

THE SECOND ADVENT

It’s celebrating Christ’s continued presence in our lives, our churches, our
homes, our communities, our world.
Matthew describes the gift of the season of Advent in a single word: *Emmanuel*,
God with us. Not *God has been* with us; not *God will be* with us; but *God*
with us, right now.

THE THIRD ADVENT

It’s celebrating the return of Christ to earth.
When will Christ return? Who knows? It will come suddenly.
People will be eating and drinking, marrying and celebrating.
Some will be ready, and some will not.
Jesus tells us not to waste our time on things we’re not supposed to know, but to
spend our time on things we are supposed to know.
Are we “adventing” – battling the forces of evil and injustice and wickedness in
the world?

Prayer Concerns: Members – Burney Biesel, Dorothy Miles, Carolyn Perkins ... **Friends** – Janice Arnold, Melinda Banks, Pat Bryan, Mildred Chandler, Emily Davis, **Reggie Deloach**, Tyla Fowlkes, John Fumbanks, Brandon Funderburk, Margaret Hayes, **Teresia Hilliard**, Ed Hinson, Gary Hinson, Gene HrnCir, Matt Jennings, Jeff Joyner, Kim Evans Lee, Jimmy Patterson, **Earl Vickery**, Todd Warren ...

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, we stand before your throne this morning just like the two Jesus described in our scripture reading. Some of us stand before you filled with a sense of pride over how righteous we are and how well we are living our lives. Just look at us. We got up on our day off, got dressed and came to church. We even brought our Bibles. We're really feeling good about ourselves, but wonder about a few others who sitting around us. Others of us come filled with a sense of shame over lives that are not going so well, over mistakes made, and wounds that are deep. It's hard for us to sit in a sanctuary filled with so many "good" people. We know we aren't worthy.

Loving God, why is it that when we stumble or fail or fall, so many people, even our friends and sometimes our family, are ready to put us down, point a finger or turn away? And their criticism stings so much! It stings because we know deep down that they are probably right in their assessment of us, and what they think matters. But we also know that you are there to pick us up, set us on our feet, and guide us back to the path again. Show us how to do that for others. Enable us to heal and not to hurt; to lighten burdens and not to add to them; to listen to the pain of others without turning our backs or becoming judgmental; and to lead all people into the light of your love. Help them to know that even though they may have fallen, they are forgiven, and they are loved.

Bless us now with your presence and your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray ...

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

MATTHEW 24:36-44

“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, 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 when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched 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 hour you do not expect.

SERMON SCHEDULE

In the Sanctuary:

December 9	<i>The Anticipation</i>	Matthew 3:1-12
December 16	<i>The Answer</i>	Matthew 11:2-11
December 23	<i>The Announcement</i>	Matthew 1:18-25
December 24	<i>Christmas Eve Communion</i>	6:00 & 9:00 p.m.
December 30	<i>Post-Christmas Blues</i>	10:40 a.m. Worship Only

On the Radio (1450 AM & 102 FM)

December 9	<i>Can You Read the Signs?</i>	Luke 21:25-36
December 16	<i>Once Upon a Time</i>	Matthew 1:18-25
December 23	<i>Don't Forget to Remember Me</i>	Luke 2:1-20
December 30	<i>Choosing Another Way</i>	Matthew 2:1-12