

Matthew 25:1-13  
“Wake, Awake, the Bridegroom is Coming!”  
Advent Midweek 1

December 1, 2021  
First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.  
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Intro]**

Three days ago, we entered the season of Advent, which is a season of expectation, anticipation, and penitence, as the Church looks back to the past, looks at the now, and looks into the future. We remember how Christ came in our flesh at His first advent, we see Christ now through His Word and Sacraments, and we have the joyful expectation and certain hope of His coming again in our flesh on the Last Day.

The season of Advent is a countdown. Advent receives its significance from what is at the end of the countdown: Christmas.

Today on this first Wednesday in Advent, we will look at what is known as the King of the Lutheran Chorale: “Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying.” In this jubilant hymn by Philipp Nicolai, we are introduced to the Advent parable about the countdown to Christ’s second coming in the Parable of the Ten Virgins.

The message of this parable and hymn is *not* about believers and unbelievers but is rather a warning to the Church here on Earth: Wake, awake!

Through this hymn and parable, Christ prepares us through the warning that He is nearing His Second Coming on the Last Day lest we be excluded from His kingdom. The countdown is nearing its end. He, the Bridegroom, is nearing to bring the faithful – *His Bride, the Church* – to be united to Him at the great wedding feast.

**[Awake, O Church]**

Tonight’s sermon hymn “Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying” opens with watchmen on the battlements of a castle shouting the midnight cry “Awake, Jerusalem,” just as they would do if the city were being invaded. But this is a joyful shout, for the Bridegroom has arrived, and the wedding can commence.

Now, this is no ordinary wedding, for it is the Church, the new Jerusalem, who is gathered to await the coming of her Lord, to whom she is betrothed.

*“Wake, awake, for night is flying,”  
The watchmen on the heights are crying;  
“Awake, Jerusalem, arise!”  
Midnight hears the welcome voices  
And at the thrilling cry rejoices:  
“Oh, where are ye, ye virgins wise?”*

Even with the loud midnight cry, the virgins are sleeping. Now, these virgins would be like bridesmaids today. In the days of Jesus’ first advent, the couple’s parents would have arranged the marriage. And as the wedding day drew nearer, part of the joy and anticipation included the bridegroom coming to meet his bride. It would be a surprise when he would come. He could come at any moment – *in the daytime or even at midnight*.

As for the bride, she was to be ready whenever her bridegroom came. So, it was the duty of her bridesmaids — *the virgins in our parable* — to keep her awake for the time he would arrive.

But **“As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept”** (Matthew 25:5).

Suddenly, at midnight, there was a cry, **“Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him”** (Matthew 25:6).

So:

*Your lamps with gladness take!  
Alleluia!  
With bridal care  
Yourselves prepare  
To meet the Bridegroom, who is near.*

But there is a problem: none of the virgins was prepared. Instead of anticipating the bridegroom’s arrival, they were all asleep. But among them, Jesus teaches us that there is a difference among these virgins. He says that five of them were foolish and five were wise.

So, what makes one foolish and one wise? The foolish did not believe that the bridegroom would arrive in the middle of the night, so they didn't bring any extra oil for their lamps. The wise believed that the bridegroom could come in the middle of the night, so they were prepared with extra oil for their lamps. But, even more than that, the wise virgins are wise, because they were not afraid to ask for forgiveness as they repented by trimming their lamps. Even when they failed to keep watch, the wise believed and had faith in the bridegroom's coming. The wise are wise because they repented of their sin.

This parable is a warning to the Church. You see, every virgin in this parable is a Christian – *the wise and the fool*.

Although all had fallen asleep, just as all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), the difference among the ten virgins was their faith in the Bridegroom. This faith is represented by the oil or lack of oil. This faith is confidence in God's promises.

For us this day, I ask you this question: Is Christ actually coming? Yes! He says so! He always keeps His promises! We don't go by our feelings on when we think He may or may not arrive, since due to our sinful nature, our feelings are flawed. We just trust His Word!

The difference between the virgins was genuine faith in the Bridegroom. You see, half of the virgins trusted in the Bridegroom's coming, while the other half did not, yet they all claimed to be faithful.

Among Christianity, we have Christians who are true believers in Christ and His promises and we have Christians who claim to belong to God, but they do not trust in Christ.

This can also be illustrated by the doctrine known as the visible and invisible church. The visible church is before our eyes and it contains the marks of the church – *Word and Sacrament* – as well as true believers and hypocrites. The invisible church is unseen by our eyes as it is only seen by God. Membership in the invisible church is based on faith in Christ alone.

Among the invisible church, these Christians live their lives according to Christ in daily repentance.

You see, faith is not merely something in the head of the believer that is stored away in the brain. No, true faith is a living, pulsating, active thing. A faith that has no works of faith is not actually true faith. So, a person who is lacking in such works and yet lays claim to faith is deluding himself most tragically because ***“faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”*** (James 2:17).

But Christ — *the Bridegroom* — ***“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”*** (1 Timothy 2:4), so just as a father warns his child in order to protect the child from danger, Christ warns us — *the church visible and church invisible* — that He is coming soon!

***[The Church Hears the Call and Rejoices through Repentance]***

After the warning —

*Zion hears the watchmen singing,  
And all her heart with joy is springing;  
She wakes, she rises from her gloom.*

Zion is the Church — *the Bride of Christ* — and she is awake. She hears the watchmen singing this good news that is so joyous. Upon hearing the joyous call, the wise of the church heeds the call and rejoices! These wise Christians come to repentance, which is an act of this hope!

Meanwhile, the foolish in the church — *who lack true faith, by not repenting of their sins* — will come to the wise Christians and ask them for help saying, ***“Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out”*** (Matthew 25:8). In response, the wise refuse, since if they do help the fools, it may become too late for the wise to enter the banquet hall with the Bridegroom, and they would not share in the joys of the wedding festivities.

The Bridegroom eventually arrives and the wise enter with Him to the marriage feast.

*Now come, Thou Blessèd One,  
Lord Jesus, God’s own Son,  
Hail! Hosanna!  
We enter all  
The wedding hall  
To eat the Supper at Thy call.*

**“And the door was shut”** (Matthew 25:10). In the spiritual truth our Lord teaches here, He pictures the happy lot of all the true Christians — those of the invisible Church. They will be ready when He, the Bridegroom returns to earth **“with power and great glory”** (Matthew 24:30). For while they were eagerly waiting for Jesus to bring them to Himself, they kept watch. But how could they have kept watch by being asleep?

Like the foolish virgins, the wise virgins are sinners – *like you and me* – so they did not deserve to enter the marriage feast any more than the foolish virgins. But again, there is a difference. In this parable, Jesus is teaching us about His coming on the Last Day – the Day of Judgement – when the Bridegroom will return and call the faithful, repentant believers to the eternal marriage feast.

You see, we keep watch by feeding the oil of our faith through the proclamation of His Word and His Sacrament as He comes to us now! The foolish virgins prove that faith can be lost. So, faith requires constant replenishment. It is through constant replenishment — *through His Means of Grace* — that God keeps us with Himself.

Look at it this way: how do we keep ourselves from starving to death? We eat! Likewise, faith cannot survive without the Word and Sacraments. So, without God’s Word and His Sacrament, our faith will dry up and die. But with God’s Word and Sacrament, it won’t! True faith in Christ cannot burn out as long as it is strengthened by God’s Word and His Sacrament!

Even with all the words of warning, the foolish still cling to the idea that somehow Jesus will on the Last Day open heaven’s doors to them, even though they are unrepentant hypocrites. To them, Jesus says to them, **“Truly, I say to you, I do not know you”** (Matthew 25:12).

But for all true repentant believers who confessed their sins to God the Father, received His forgiveness through faith in Christ and received His Means of Grace in Word and Sacrament, Christ will say: *“I know you! The door is open! Enter now the wedding hall!”*

***[The Church Sings Eternally as the Bride of Christ]***

Upon entering the marriage feast, the Bride of Christ begins singing:

*Now let all the heav’ns adore Thee,  
Let saints and angels sing before Thee*

*With harp and cymbals' clearest tone.  
Of one pearl each shining portal,  
Where, joining with the choir immortal,  
We gather round Thy radiant throne.  
No eye has seen the light,  
No ear has heard the might  
Of Thy glory;  
Therefore will we  
Eternally  
Sing hymns of praise and joy to Thee!*

In the meantime, we watch, for we know neither the day nor the hour. We watch knowing that the Bridegroom is coming. We need not fear that day, for we are filled with Christ, made holy, forgiven, redeemed, prepared for just that day. And while we know right now that we are His holy Bride, we receive this day a foretaste of this marriage feast to come. Even so, the Church says to its Bridegroom, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." The countdown is nearing its end, so wake, awake, the Bridegroom is coming! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠