

Rev. Dan Welch Advent 1 11 30-22 Text- Matthew 24: 36- 44

When is the right time to start getting ready for Christmas? There was a discussion question posted on the First Lutheran School Facebook page last week asking when people thought it was the right time to decorate for Christmas: Is it before Thanksgiving or after? I said “after”, but that the Bible is silent on the subject. So, either is just fine!

In any case, we all know that Christmas is definitely coming soon! Just 3 ½ weeks away! Many people have begun to count down the days, especially kids. The thing is, for that first Christmas, that is, when Jesus was born, no one was really ready. No one knew that Christ was coming, except a very small group of people. The rest of the world was preoccupied with other things. The Roman Emperor had ordered that a census should be taken for tax purposes. Back then, when there was a census, the law compelled you to go back to your ancestors' hometown and register there. That's what everyone was doing during the first Christmas. People were traveling, making arrangements about places to stay, where to eat, where to register for the census. Parties were taking

place. Activities were going on. People were visiting family and friends they hadn't seen in a while.

It was a very busy, very hectic time in world history. The last thing on most people's minds was whether or not the Messiah would be born. After all, God had been promising to send the Messiah for thousands of years and right then, most people had others things to think about.

And then Christ was born, and everyone missed it. Well, almost everyone. There was Mary and Joseph, of course, they didn't miss it. There were also a few shepherds out in the fields who were told by the angels what was going on. Hundreds of miles away there were the wise men, who noticed the star in the east. If you study your Bible, you find out that wise men didn't make it to the manger on Christmas Eve- they came sometime later. Besides them, everyone else missed it. After the census was over, everyone went back home, completely unaware that something big just took place, one of the biggest things that could possibly happen.

Our Gospel for this evening tells us that this is how it will be the **second** time Jesus comes to earth, when He comes on Judgment Day. Most

people won't be ready for it. After all, people have been talking about the world coming to an end for thousands of years. Right now, most people have other things that they're thinking about.

This evening though, through His Word, our Lord encourages us to keep ourselves spiritually ready and spiritually alert, because He is coming. Don't let yourself be caught unprepared. That's the main message God's Word has for us this evening: "***Be ready.***"

Our text begins with Jesus talking about how it was during the days of Noah, the first time God destroyed the world. "People were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away." Didn't God give those people a chance? Yes, He did. For many, many years, those people had the chance to watch a "crazy" old man build a giant wooden box. For years, they listened to him talk about how God was going to send a flood, and it was time for them to repent. They all thought Noah was nuts. But then the flood came, and they were completely unprepared and drowned.

'That's how it will be,' Jesus says, 'when I come again. Some of you will be ready, and some of you will not.' Look at the example Jesus uses in verse 40- two men will be in a field- one taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding grain- one taken, the other left. Jesus is emphasizing here how some will be ready for His second coming, and some will not.

His main point is found in verse 42: "Stay awake (keep watch) because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." Later, Jesus says that He will come at a time when you do not expect Him." The sad thing is, most people are **not** ready! Our other reading from Romans 13, describes what it looks like **not** to be ready. Look at verse 13: Lots of people use this time of the year as an excuse to get drunk. If Jesus returns, and that's you, what will He do with you? St. Paul mentions sexual immorality here- that, and money, are two driving forces in our country- if you let yourself get caught up in those things, and Jesus returns- you're not ready- then what? Paul also speaks of quarreling and jealousy- people not getting along with each other- fighting with people, not apologizing,

not asking for forgiveness, not forgiving. If that's you, and Jesus returns- you're not ready.

All of these things come from our sinful hearts. Even though we are Christians, we still, at times, fall into the same sins that our unbelieving friends fall into. There are times in our lives when we let our faith get very stale- when we grow very distant from Jesus Christ- and then we start living and talking just like the unbelieving world. Our sin makes us unprepared for Christ's coming.

Yet, in His mercy Jesus forgives you. He leaves you on this planet for many purposes. Any one of those purposes is to give you time to prepare for His coming. If your relationship with God doesn't exist, or if your relationship with God has grown stale, or if you're just a Christian who needs to get stronger- we all fit under at least one of those categories, don't we? - then let's start getting ready for Jesus' arrival right now. We do this by first of all realizing that we all have sin, and that we all need God's help. Confess your sins to God. That's step number one when it comes to getting ready. And step number two, is believing God's Word

that you are forgiven. Believing that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was enough to take your sins away- in the eyes of God, you are forgiven, and the gift of eternal life is yours. Believe it. That's step number two. How often should you do those two steps? I do them every day- every day there are sins that I confess to God. And every day, I stop for a moment, and ponder that all my sins have been taken away by the blood of Jesus Christ, and that I am forgiven. Do that every day, and God will change you into someone who is more and more prepared for Christ's return.

Do you want to know what that looks like? You can tell when someone has prepared their **home** for Christmas. You see the lights and decorations on the outside and inside the decorated tree, the lights, the garland, bows, and other decorations around the house you look at that house and you say to yourself, "That's what a house prepared for Christmas looks like." But what does a **person** look like who's prepared for Christ's second coming?

If you see someone who is spending time in God's Word, you're seeing someone who is preparing for Christ's return. "If you hold to my

teaching," Jesus says, "then you are really my disciples." God's Word is where God works on you, where God changes your heart and changes your life. Also, if you want to know what a person looks like who's getting ready for Christ's return, look at our Epistle lesson from Romans 13. It talks about how a person behaves decently- different from our culture. Instead of drunkenness and sexual immorality, that person is sober, clear-minded, and pure of heart. Instead of quarreling, that person is forgiving and loving. Instead of jealousy, that person is content and generous with what he has. That's what a person looks like who is ready for Christ's return.

And the time to get ready is now. Remember, Christ is coming to judge those who have rejected Him. But He's also coming to bless you. Little kids always look forward to Christmas with lots of excitement and eagerness. And you can look forward to Judgment Day the same way. Christ, your Savior, is coming to bless you. Be ready for the surprise.