

First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2016, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 24:29-44

"The King is Coming!"

First, let me say "Happy New Year!" That's right: "Happy New Year!" Today is the first Sunday of the new church year –the Lectionaries have changed and we are now in Year A. Just last week we were in Year C of the 3 year cycle. For the Daily Lectionary for the Daily Office – we are now in Year 1 of the 2 year cycle – based on the coming year, whether it is odd or even. It is a 'new year' for us as we begin to prepare with this First Sunday of Advent. When I think of Advent – I am reminded of the musical "Godspell" in which the character of John the Baptist kept singing a haunting melody of "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" You know - that is what the season of Advent is all about – preparing – because the King is coming!

We begin a season of preparation, of waiting, anticipating and hoping for the coming of the King – Jesus Christ, who, alone, saves us from everything that is trying to destroy us. Advent is a time in which we are seeking and searching for hope - or at least a break from the fear that tries to surround and engulf our lives every day. In answer to the prayers of His people, Jesus stepped into this world, He stepped into time, when He was born of Mary, to save us – and He is coming again – to reign forever! In just a couple of weeks we hope to have a pageant, on a Sunday morning, that will tell the story, using pour young people to show Jesus stepping into time, becoming man. We sang "O Come O Come Emmanuel" – Emmanuel – God with us! How true and how wonderful!

We read in today's Gospel of Matthew – Our Lord's description of events that are facing the world and we know some of the apprehension that comes along with those signs - and so we must look to our source of hope and not to the point of trouble. Jesus offers these words filled with hope and truth in Matthew 24:35 "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.*" We know that Jesus' words are faithful and true, and they give us hope and direction for the days ahead. He tells us that His word, the Holy Word of God, is eternal, trustworthy and true – and that we need to be about spreading and sharing His Word with the world. That is a primary part of our preparation! We must be about getting into and staying in the Word of God!

In Mark, chapter 4 - Jesus' tells His followers to "*Listen.*" Jesus says: "*Let anyone with ears to hear listen.*" Ironically enough, as Jesus preached He was surrounded by people who were unwilling to listen; they were trying to trip Him up – we call them the Pharisees; people who were unwilling to listen to Jesus or to hear what He is really saying. They refuse to hear the actual voice of God speaking to them of a new way of living, a purpose for creation that is not based upon power and violence. To truly "listen" is to listen through the ears of Jesus Christ, through His heart, and to hear the cries of those in need and hear that true power comes in doing service for others. How many of us have ever prayed to be able to hear with Jesus' ears?

Today's Holy Gospel reading is part of a lesson which is often called Jesus' "Olivet discourse." The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke relay accounts of Jesus' teaching right across from the City of Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives. In this lesson from Matthew chapter 24, Jesus'

principal message is for His followers to stand guard. Jesus tells us to in Matthew 24:42 *“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”* His message stresses the need for us to open our eyes and see the world as God sees the world. Pray that God would allow you to have the eyes of Jesus Christ to see the world as it really is; to see the events of the world as Jesus sees them. In the midst of terror, we must recognize that God is there; He is not only in control, but He has a plan to help us through it. We also need to have eyes to recognize evil for what it is. Evil is from the enemy. Don't think for one moment that evil comes from God; it is the absence of God, just like darkness is the absence of light. What happens when you walk into a dark room and you turn on the light? In some places critters scatter! That is the effect of light – Jesus is the Light of the World. The absence of God is evil. Evil is from the enemy and it is nothing more than an empty promise which is totally meaningless. Meaning and purpose to life can only be found only in the One who created the world; the One who promises to save all those who look to Him in times of terror, distress and heartache – and to trust totally in Him. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven by the Blood of Jesus, and there is no problem that Jesus cannot help you through.

In Matthew 24:29 Jesus' words begin with what many perceive to be foreboding and terror. He says: *“Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”*

These are really frightening events, but they may seem insignificant in light of the terror that faces the world today. We have all been witnesses, and many of us remember September 11 – and the day that it seemed that the earth stood still. Our minds race with images and our own personal memories of that tragic event. Each one of us has personal stories regarding that day. No, we don't need images of darkened skies and falling stars to know terror – we are living in the midst of it! Every day – just turn on the news!

But in answer to this terror, Jesus warns us to *“be ready.”* Jesus is telling us keep watch! Keep alert!

- See things as God wants us see them.
- See God in the midst of all this terror as He is promising us hope.
- We must recognize that only God gives life meaning.

Life is not defined by the fear or the threat from the enemy - who only wants to scare us, to fill us with fear, to throw us off track or to even to try to control us. We need to recognize evil for what it is, and recognize that God is with us – Emmanuel - and that He is at work even in the midst of all the evil. So let me remind you once again - that each one of us should be asking God to give us eyes to see as He does; and ears to hear as He does; asking so that we can see people and things as He does. We all need to see in a new way; to keep awake and aware to God's way of seeing.

Jesus indeed reminds us that the time is coming, that none of us knows, in which the King is coming – and we must be ready, we must prepare. I believe that it is time to broaden our

vision. It's time for us to stop looking over our shoulders for those who threaten us and instead for us to look and see the broken ones who desperately need God;

- who need His healing and His mercy;
- who need the comfort of His Word.

Each and every person needs to have God in their life. We are created to know, love and worship God. When someone does not know God - they are left with a huge "black hole" in their life - and many seek to wreak havoc in the lives of others.

Knowing God, serving Him and worshipping Him is what we as the Body of Christ, the community of believers in fellowship - are called to do - to come together and grow - and to step out together in love, in new ways of sharing Christ's love with the community around us. We have been given a great opportunity to as St. Andrew's Anglican Church - to look for new ways and new opportunities for sharing Christ's love; and to live the truth that can only be found in His Holy Word. We can make a difference by being an example to others in the way that we live - based on God's example in His Holy Word. We need to let Christ's light shine in us - by inviting our friends, our family to come to our church - and to experience God's Word in action! The opportunity is ours. How can we spread the Gospel? Invite your friends to come and hear God's Word. You don't have to sign up - you don't have to get an ID card - just let them come.

To *watch, to keep alert or awake* is to open our eyes and see God active in the world. In this season of Advent are preparing to remember when God stepped into history - in the person of His Blessed Son, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but if you recall -those people didn't recognize the King - instead they ridiculed, rejected, and murdered Him. They hung Him from a cross - BUT - God's promises cannot be destroyed - Jesus rose from the dead - and He is ALIVE today! Remember, God DID promise that His King would reign. When Jesus the King, comes again- His followers will have nothing to fear - but instead to rejoice that He has come to reign over us and draw us to Himself for all eternity. Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew 24:30 *"They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."* **There will be no mistaking this event when it happens - none whatsoever!** What will be fearful to many will be a means for those who know Jesus - to see Him face to face and to worship our King! His words are true - and you can take that to the bank! Jesus also told us that *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."* (Matthew 24:35) It is in His Words that we can put our trust, and know that God is as good as His promises.

I want to ask you to turn to page 1655 in your Pew Bibles: Jesus made it all the more clear when He told us in John 5:24-27 *"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."* The King is coming - and we can be filled with hope at the thought of His coming, and I know that I cannot wait!

We enter this season of Advent, a time of anticipation before the most festive season of the year - Christmas is so beautiful – the lights, the carols, the family events; we also need to recognize it as a time of anticipation for the One WHO IS TO COME again. We see all around us things that give us false hope and false meaning to our lives. Those things are not where our hope lies. As followers of Jesus Christ, we long for the coming of the One who promises to release the captives, gives sight to the blind, and faith in Him brings hope for you and me in the midst of all that would incite terror in us today – we find the hope of Christ. The hope for the world is found in One who came as a vulnerable child into this world,

- in One who knows our fears and terrors and cries with us in the midst of the terror, but also shows us a way through the terror to hope.
- It is Jesus who has the power to destroy the powers that destroy people! He is coming – the King is coming!

We are not supposed to blindly ignore what is happening in the world today. Yes, we need to think about the events, but instead we are to watch them with new eyes – which are illuminated in the light of the hope – the light of the Gospel. Keep watch, Keep awake, the Savior of the world is about to return and there is great hope! The King is coming!