

## ADVENT: A TIME OF HOPEFUL EXPECTATION

### First Sunday of Advent

December 2, 2007

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

### Surprise!

Can you recall a time when you were surprised? Perhaps by something totally unexpected? Were you caught completely off guard? Maybe you thought afterward, “if only I had known,” or “I wish I had been prepared!”

Getting ready ... being prepared. Well, here's your chance! The Advent season is upon us, and a new year in the life of the church has begun! A time to get ready for God's wonderful surprise – the birth of the Savior, God's beloved Son. The word “advent” is derived from a Latin term that means “coming” and the Advent season begins four Sundays before Christmas. It is a time that invites us to wait for the coming of Jesus and to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth. It is truly a time of hopeful expectation.

As we wait with hope, this week's Gospel text reminds us of Jesus' coming in power and glory at the close of the age. While many may wonder when that will be, Jesus tells us that “no one knows the day or hour ... only the Father knows” (Matthew 24:36, *CEV*). And we are admonished by Jesus to “be ready” since we don't know when he will come (verse 44).

All around us it seems that the commercial world is urging us, with increased intensity, to get ready for Christmas – window decorations begin appearing as early as October; our mailboxes are flooded with holiday circulars and catalogs; stores open the day after Thanksgiving at 4:00 and 5:00 a.m., seeking to lure buyers with special sales and other shopping incentives. How easy, and perhaps tempting, to get caught up in the frenzied pace of the pre-Christmas season. Are we any different from the unprepared people in Noah's day who “were eating, drinking, and getting married right up to the day that the flood came” (Matthew 24:38, *CEV*)? Think how surprised they must have been when God acted! To be so preoccupied can cause us to lose sight of and miss what God has in store.

Yes, the Advent season bids us pause, reflect, and prepare for God's amazing surprise. We are invited to prepare our hearts so that we will be ready to receive God's gift of love, God's own Son. When Jesus was born, no one expected the Messiah to come as a baby.

Surprise ...! God's gift of love came to us in an unexpected and joyful way. With the birth of Jesus, God broke into human history to dwell among us. God's sending the Holy Spirit empowers us to be prepared for the unexpected hour when Christ will come again. The apostle Paul warns us to "wake up" and to "live properly" because "the day when we will be saved is nearer now" (Romans 13:11, *CEV*) than ever before.

Living "in between Advents," we prepare for the birth of Jesus – Emmanuel, God with us – and we joyfully await his coming again. In the days ahead, be open to God's surprises in your life as you prepare your heart to welcome and receive the Savior. As in Noah's time, God will act when we least expect it. Are you ready?

This week's Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

+ + +

**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Japan** – With thanks to God for the success of the International Bible Forum and with prayers for the ability to organize more events and provide Scripture products to enable people to know about the Bible and experience the life-changing power of God's Word; **North Korea** – With prayers that the country may become more open and that the people may be delivered from their spiritual barrenness, and with prayers that the Christians in this country will be strengthened in their hope that they will soon be truly free to practice their faith; **South Korea** – With thanks to God that the Bible Society has been able to serve the UBS fellowship as a Scripture production center and with thanks to God that Korean churches are now using the Revised Korean Bible, and with prayers for the establishment of God's Kingdom in North Korea so that the people may be free to read the Scriptures.

**Activity Corner:** "Waiting for Jesus with a Heart Filled with HOPE"

Supplies needed: Bible; Bible Concordance; small notebook or writing paper; pen/pencil.

The theme for the first week of Advent is HOPE. Look up the word HOPE in a Bible Concordance and then look up several Bible passages that contain the word. What is the hope that is expressed in each passage? Consider keeping an Advent Journal to record your thoughts and reflections. At the end of the week, prepare a prayer that incorporates your thoughts. Share your prayer with members of your household during a time of family devotion.

Throughout the Advent season, gather with members of your household and reflect daily on Christ's Advent – his coming on Christmas as a baby in Bethlehem, his coming to you each day through the Holy Scriptures and prayer, and his promise to come again at the close of the age. The Bible readings for Advent remind us to remain alert and faithful as we prepare for and await our Lord's coming. If you are using an Advent Wreath, light the first candle prior to the Scripture reading for the day.

Sunday	Isaiah 40:1-11
Monday	Isaiah 61:1-11
Tuesday	Jeremiah 31:1-14
Wednesday	Romans 5:1-11
Thursday	Romans 15:7-13
Friday	1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11
Saturday	2 Peter 3:1-18

Conclude each day's reading with prayer and singing the first verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" or one of your favorite Advent carols.