

ADVENT STUDIES 2023

MARKS GOSPEL

Introduction

The Season of Advent inaugurates the New Year for the Christian Church. ***It is not a season of preparation for Christmas***, as is so often happens in the church. If it is not a season of preparation for Christmas, then what is the purpose of Advent?

The Season of Advent is all about reminding us as Christians that Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead. It is a reminder that we live in between the two Advents, the first, when Jesus came in fulfilment of the Old Testament Prophecies, and we wait in anticipation for his promised coming again as Jesus himself promised. John the Baptist is the transitional figure between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He is the Elijah figure promised to foreshadow the promised Messiah.

Advent is all about preparation, but as I said above, not for Christmas. Advent is a reminder that we need to be ready and waiting for Jesus, alert and watching and waiting.

The Gospel of Mark does not have many parables such as Luke and Matthew on watching and waiting. Chapter 13 is where the most obvious references to the return of Jesus is located. In vv 24-26 Jesus speaks about the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds with great power and glory, and in vv 32-36 Jesus speaks of his return in terms of no one knowing the hour or the day, so be alert and watching.

In this study we will need to explore other Gospels to give us a sense of this watching and waiting. In our first study we will look at the whole issue of Christian Hope. This is an important starting point for us, for the rest of our Christian year is predicated on Hope. Then we will look at three women who not only exemplified hope but also the need to be watching and waiting and ready for Jesus when he returns. We will look at Anna the prophetess, Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary and, of course, Mary the mother of Jesus.

One final word. While the Season of Advent is not preparation for Christmas it is placed conveniently alongside the Season of Christmas to remind us that just as Jesus came in fulfilment of the promise of the first Advent, so we can have confidence he will come again in fulfilment of the second Advent. We hold on to this hope through the whole of the Christian year, allowing each season to build on the previous, not allowing us to think that with each passing season we are done with it, but we need to hold on to each season to help make sense of the next.

Week 1

Hope

What do we mean when we use the word Hope? For about 5 minutes in your group have a short discussion about what comes to mind for you when you hear the word Hope. Write anything that is helpful below.

What did you glean from the discussion, was there anything that really comes to mind for you about hope?

Part of the problem we have in our world is we often confuse hope with optimism. Have a few minutes to discuss amongst yourselves what might the difference be between hope and optimism.

The major difference between hope, especially biblical hope and optimism is that Christian biblical hope is based on a promise. Optimism has no such basis. While it is great to be optimistic, often times failed optimism can lead to despair.

It might be good to speak a little about Advent. What do we think about when we reflect of Advent?

The season of Advent is placed prior to the season of Christmas, why do you think that is the case?

Advent is not about Christmas. It is about the hope based on the promise of Jesus that he will come again, as we recite in the Creed. How might this hope be conveyed today, given that Jesus' return seems to be delayed?

Here is one of the classic messages of hope from the Old Testament
Isaiah 11

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;

for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. Isaiah 11:1-10

Discuss this passage in your group

What stands out for you and why?

What is the message of verses 1-6?

What is the message of verses 7-10?

Why is this a message of hope?

Why can we trust this message of hope?

When Jesus says he will return, why can we have confidence in that promise?

