

# **First Sunday of Advent + Year A**

## **November 27, 2022**

*The new church year begins with a wake-up call: Christ is coming soon! In today's readings both Paul and Jesus challenge us to wake from sleep, for we know neither the day nor hour of the Lord's coming. Isaiah proclaims the day when God will gather all people on the holy mountain and there will be no more war or suffering. Though we vigilantly watch for the promised day of salvation, we wait for what we already have: Christ comes among us this day as the word and meal that strengthens our faith in the promises of God.*

### **Isaiah**

- Isaiah is considered one of prophetic books of the Hebrew scriptures. Chapters 1-39 are often referred to as “First Isaiah” or “Proto-Isaiah”, thought to originate from the historical person known as Isaiah in the 8th century BCE. Isaiah was thought to perhaps be of royal lineage, as he had access to and relationship with four kings.
- Isaiah wrote from the southern kingdom of Judah. Assyrian power in the region was building during this “Proto-Isaiah” period, and Isaiah commented upon it. In 720 BCE, Assyria captured the Northern Kingdom (Israelite) capital city of Samaria. Judah’s capital Jerusalem was later sieged by Assyria in 701 BCE but not captured.
- *[Chapter 2 verses 1-5] address a nation facing an uncertain future. The relative prosperity and peace the nations of Israel and Judah experienced during the early 8th century BCE are a distant memory—like a dream one barely remembers after waking. Instead, the relentless advances of the Assyrian Empire have decimated the nation of Israel. Many Israelites escaped Assyria’s invasion of their home and sought refuge within Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem. This southern refuge soon confronts the same Assyrian enemy and the hardships a prolonged military siege produces. Against this backdrop of suffering, anxiety, and imminent imperial conquest, the prophet announces he has received a vision concerning God’s perspective about Judah and Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:1).<sup>1</sup>*
  - What strikes you in this vision?
  - How does the immediate context of Isaiah’s lived reality influence the way we understand this pericope?
- Why would this scripture be proclaimed on this day?

### **Psalm**

- This psalm is a “song of ascent”, that is, it would have been sung en route by families or groups of people who were on pilgrimage hiking up into Jerusalem for holidays or other significant life events.
- How does this psalm in particular strike you? Does the tone work with or against it? How does the refrain focus us?
- What sort of life experiences might lead to writing a song such as this one?
- Why do you think this song is offered in response to the reading from Isaiah?
- Why would this scripture be proclaimed on this day?

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<sup>1</sup> Joel B. Kemp, Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia; [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)

## **Romans**

- Romans is an authentic Pauline letter, perhaps \*the\* central epistle of the New Testament.
- Earlier in the letter, Paul lays out his grand argument for God's faithful working of salvation for the world. The part we hear today is part of Paul's examples of how the Christian community might live in response to that reality of God's work.
  - Be transformed by the renewing of your minds!
  - Love one another, care for others, be generously hospitable, take part in society, tend to life's relationships!
  - WAKE FROM SLEEP! SALVATION IS NEAR! (today's text)
  - Refrain from judgment of those around you, encourage one another (don't trip each other up), welcome outsiders.
- Why do you think Paul uses the metaphor of waking from sleep?
- Why would this scripture be proclaimed on this day?

## **The Gospel**

- We're beginning Advent at the end of the Matthew's Gospel. Why might this be?
- Note here that in this "end of days" scenario, being taken is the \*bad\* news, like those swept away in the ancient flood. (This rubs against the image the pop-culture "Left Behind" books left in many of our minds!)
- Matthew's Jesus uses the metaphor of keeping awake, similarly to Paul's letter to the Romans.
- What direction is the divine moment?
- Why would this scripture be proclaimed on this day?

## **Final Questions**

- Reflect on the lyrics of the Hymn of the Day and how it brings forth themes from the scriptures of this season.
- Which part of the ordo (Gathering/Word/Meal/Sending) do these texts most deeply connect to? Why?
- What's the Good News?