

## Gospel lesson

On this Christ the King Sunday, we are beginning our Advent look ahead to the majestic return of our awesome Lord and Savior:



picture from  
[https://www.pexels.com/  
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### Mark 13:24-37

NRSV

<sup>24</sup> "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

<sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup> Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.

<sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>28</sup> "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.

<sup>29</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

<sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

<sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>32</sup> "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

<sup>33</sup> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

<sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

<sup>35</sup> Therefore, keep awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,

<sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.

<sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

UMH #196>

<Joseph portrayal>



picture screencapture from  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LspA-t\\_DZbw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LspA-t_DZbw); credit: LUMO

Hello. I am Joseph of Nazareth. I am an honorable Jewish man of the line of King David. I earn good wages as a carpenter and handyman; I work hard and well. My neighbors can tell you what I have built and repaired for them - I am respected at the town gates.

Lately I have been thinking about continuing our family line, about getting a wife - maybe someone who cooks better than I do, someone who can help my mother with the housework.

Arrangements were made for me to marry a nice Jewish girl named Mary. She seemed ideal - related to Zechariah of the temple - you know, the one who had a holy visit and could not speak, but was blessed to have a son by his old wife Elizabeth - like Abraham and Sarah were blessed to have Isaac. What an honor to get a maiden related to them as my wife!

Mary even stayed with Elizabeth for three months, to help her as Elizabeth got too big to manage things easily toward the end of her pregnancy. But Mary had some shocking news for me - she was pregnant too! And we know it is not just something in the water that makes \*that\* happen.

I was upset. Now I understood why her family was willing to let her marry a carpenter instead of an important temple leader. Well I was not going to cover up for them; I deserve better! But they have

prestige in the community, so rather than make a big public fuss and destroy all our lives, I resolved to break it off quietly.

Then the strangest thing happened. Just like my ancestor Jacob, I had a dream where an angel of the Lord spoke to me. The angel said that I should marry Mary and support her baby, because the child was from the Holy Spirit.

The angel even told me his name was to be “Jesus” (which means “God saves”) and that this would fulfill what Isaiah said about the young woman conceiving and bearing a son that they would name “Emmanuel” (which means “God with us”).

I woke up stunned. I never thought God would send an angel to speak directly to me! I was not even in the holy temple, or one of the Levites who do the sacrifices - I was just in my normal, everyday house, and God sent me an angel! I did not dare refuse - the story is that Zechariah did not believe his angel and he got silenced, so I believed my angel!

This has to be some important person if God sent a messenger about him. I wonder if he might even be the promised Messiah, who will free us from our Roman oppression and make us a great nation of our own again - someone even stronger than the Maccabees were!

Well, I know my duty. I will marry Mary, but I will not do anything that might be a problem for her baby. With the tax decree, we have to go to Bethlehem to register; I guess we should stay there until after the baby is born as traveling will already be difficult enough, and we can dedicate him at the big temple in Jerusalem instead of a local synagogue.

I have to confess, I am nervous about this, but hopeful too, and maybe still in shock. I know God blesses those who obey His commandments, so I will do my best in the hope that our family will be pleasing before God and well-blessed. Here's to the shocking hope of already expecting a baby – *Mazel Tov!*

## Message: Stand as a Signal



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/our-spirit-waits/first-sunday-of-advent-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/first-sunday-of-advent-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Wondrous God of Hope,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That in our waiting for Your return, we may be again

filled with anticipatory hope. Amen.

Given the Hanging of the Greens next week, this week we are jumping into the first service of the Advent series "Our Spirit Waits" with "Our Shocking Hope."

"It's here! The season of waiting we've all been waiting for is here!

Too much? Probably. But nonetheless, this first Sunday of Advent comes with a sense of arrival."

So, are you ready to jump into the Christmas season or still basking in the afterglow of Thanksgiving? Anyone have all their shopping done yet? I do not!

Advent is a busy, noisy time. Much of the year we just go about our usual routine, remembering the celebrations that were and hoping the next ones will be good.

The ancient Israelites were going about their normal routines, remembering God's great actions for the people and hoping for the Messiah to come. The psalmist (as usual) was crying out for God to come restore the people back to their former glory.

Yet Jesus warns us that the return of the Messiah will involve terrifying changes - we need to stay ready to receive God at all times, to let our lives be consecrated to serving our Lord. Otherwise, we

will miss the joy and blessings of God's arrival.

Joseph was hit with the unexpected news of Mary's pregnancy and did not recognize it as God's coming at first. He was going to miss the opportunity - until the angel roused him from the stupor of everyday life to see what was coming into the world.

It was shocking, unnerving, unsettling - yet full of promise and hope. He was planning on having a family; that is what getting married was about in those days. God blessed him with far more than he had expected!

God blesses us in unexpected ways too. What Paul described for the Corinthians applies here too: You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So accept the shocks of blessing that God puts in our lives. Pray for guidance and help in nurturing those gifts with love:

- † For yourself, develop your strength through work, your skills with use in ways that please God.
- † For our community, develop relationships through common experiences and trials; develop others through helping them as they grow over time.

Focus your life on Christ, to be ready when God moves in this world. Our God is taking care of us! We have hope: to see God's love in action, to know the Holy Spirit working through us, to see Jesus return, and to live eternally, free of sin.

It is often shocking, the difference between our expectations in this world and what God brings for us, but trust the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. Here is to our shocking hope in Christ - *Mazel Tov!*