

Scripture:

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Matthew 24:36-44

“No one knows.”

“Our God is the One who comes to us
in a burning bush,
in an angel’s song,
in a newborn child.

Our God is the One who cannot be found
locked in the church,
not even in the sanctuary.

Our God will be where God will be
with no constraints,
no predictability.

Our God lives where our God lives,
and destruction has no power
and even death cannot stop the living.

Our God will be born where God will be born,
but there is no place to look for the One who comes to us.

When God is ready
God will come
even to a “bleak” place
like a stable in Bethlehem.

Watch ...
for you know not when
God comes.

Watch, that you might be found
whenever
wherever
God comes.”

So --- Ann Weems writes in her poem ---- The Coming of God.

And this is the precise theme from today's scripture readings.

God coming when God is ready.

God coming and fulfilling His promise --- when He sees fit.

God coming --- prophecy fulfilled ---- and none of us knowing when exactly this will happen.

God following through on exactly what He said He would do --- but at an unknown --- unpredictable ---- God only knows time.

As our Gospel passage says in the opening verse --- "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

And then a little later ---- verse 42 --- "therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

And finally verse 44 --- "so you also must be ready, because the Son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Simply put ----- when Jesus will come ----- no one knows.

In the meantime --- we prepare ----- we wait ---- we hope ----- and then we start the cycle all over again ---- preparing --- waiting --- anticipating --- hoping.

Orienting our whole lives around this --- one day --- much anticipated event.

And as we wait we are not speculating --- guessing.

And we are not prognosticating --- like arm chair apocolyp ----- tists --- trying to break hidden codes in hopes of discovering a divine timeline.

And we're not dispensationalists --- looking at patterns and cycles in human history ---- trying to determine the next great act of God in a linear ---- graphed out --- so called predictable way.

Instead we are people of the promise.

Instead we are people of the prophets --- Isaiah --- Moses --- and especially for today Jeremiah who we read earlier.

Instead we are people of hope.

We live --- and we wait ---- and we anticipate --- and we prepare for the fulfillment of God's divine promise in Jesus Christ.

And so advent is the time of preparing and waiting --- anticipating --- longing even.

And of course what we prepare for and what we await is not actually Christmas.

We already know that Christmas is coming ----- we already know when Christmas is coming.

Christmas is not a --- "no one knows" ---- kind of event --- we know ---- and we know precisely.

It is the Second Advent ---- the second coming that we truly prepare for ---- and as Jesus says --- when this will happen --- no one knows --- and so we continue to wait --- and wait.

And of course in a sense the baby born in Bethlehem --- the baby Jesus --- is the fulfillment of the promise of the Hebrew Scriptures.

In a sense the Bethlehem baby is the righteous branch that will sprout from David's line ----- as we heard in Jeremiah 33.

“In those days and at that time
I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.

In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will live in safety.
This is the name by which it will be called:

The Lord Our Righteous Saviour.””

In a sense the Bethlehem baby is the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures.

But in another sense the baby is also the promise of something much more.

The Bethlehem baby --- is also all about the final arrival of the son of God at the end of time as we know it --- at an unknown hour.

We no longer just await the celebration of the baby’s birth ----- instead we await His return as Lord of heaven and earth ---- the King who sets all that is twisted and distorted and marred in this world right.

As Christians we celebrate Christmas as the renewal of the promise that God will come again.

And so we stand ready ----- and we wait --- and we anticipate --- and we long for that day.

In a sense ---- the entire message of Advent is ----- pay attention.

Pay attention to what truly matters ---- not bows --- ribbons ---- lights ----- trees ----- tinsel ---- or buy on get one free.

Pay attention ---- to what truly matters.

The movement of God.

The presence of God.

The coming of God in Christ Jesus.

Matthew’s gospel signals that there is more going on than meets the eye.

Advent marks the beginning of God’s timeline and the end of the world’s timeline ----- the end of the reign of sin and darkness.

What happens at Advent isn’t just about trees --- candles ----- gifts --- bows - --- ribbons ---- tinsel --- or 30% off sales.

What we are talking about at Advent --- is cosmic.

It's as far reaching as far reaching can be.

It's about the whole of creation being set right once again through the birth of a child who will be ----- the Messiah --- the King of Kings --- Emmanuel - -- God with us --- the Christ.

Getting ready for Christmas is a very distant second to getting ready for Christ.

We all know when to get ready for Christmas.

It's a fixed date ---- an immoveable feast.

But getting ready for the second coming ---- that's another matter entirely.

Jesus says in Matthew's gospel today ---

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.”

If you know when an event is going to happen ---- when you know when something is going to happen that requires one simple action --- you can in a sense forget about it until the precise moment you need to act.

If you know exactly when your house will be broken in --- not earlier --- not later ---- it would be rather easy to make the necessary preparations --- and adjustments.

You wouldn't have to stew much about it would you --- make preparations a plan --- forget about it until the precise moment.

That's not how it works with Christ coming.

We don't know the exact moment so we have to be on alert --- all the time.

You can well imagine what it would be like if it were authoritatively declared in the Bible just when Jesus would return --- December 29th 3:15 pm Easter time in the year 2019.

Imagine if God had of told us in this way --- precisely the hour the day and the year.

There would be the largest confessional beginning at about 3:14 on December 29th 2019 in the history of the world ---- many people would live like fools right up to the 11th hour and then seek forgiveness just under the wire.

After all doesn't Jesus forgive and set us right --- save us – in an instant they might say.

And of course He does --- think of the thief on the cross as Jesus hangs on the cross.

But that isn't what Jesus wants ----- to give no thought of Him because you know precisely when He will come --- and so simply wait until the last minute before seeking forgiveness and salvation --- ready for heaven --- ready for eternity --- thanks to the 3:14 reminder just before the end of the world.

That is not God's nature --- or will ---- or desire.

God wants relationship for far more than just an instant at the last --- although he will honour that as well.

But truly ---- He wants us to be engaged with Him for our whole lives ---- a journey in faith that isn't just about us at the last minute.

Getting ready for Christmas is a very distant second to getting ready for Christ.

The arrival of Christ --- not just symbolically or metaphorically --- but corporeally ----- literally ----- at the end of time --- of that time that no one knows.

No one knows when the full light is coming.

No one knows when the dust will settle.

No one knows when the King will reign once again.

No one knows when the Christ will rule.

No one knows when Jesus of Nazareth --- the tomb breaker --- cross crusher
----- the famous little manger baby will re-appear once again.

That's what we're celebrating --- and preparing for --- and anticipating ---
and waiting and hoping ----- and waiting and hoping and --- and hoping and
waiting ----- and waiting and hoping for.

That's why we sing ----- Oh come --- oh come Emmanuel ----- verse after
verse ----- one day we may even sing all 7 ---- to really drive the point home
about waiting and waiting and waiting.

But even with just 3 or 4 verses ----- you get a flavour for the waiting and
waiting.

Oh come --- oh come ---- rejoice --- rejoice ----- Emmanuel shall come.

Oh come --- thou wisdom from on high --- rejoice --- rejoice ----- Emmanuel
shall come.

Oh come ---- thou dayspring come ----- rejoice --- rejoice ----- Emmanuel
shall come.

We sing come ----- over and over again ----- it's almost like beckoning.

Come Jesus --- come Emmanuel ---- come --- please ---- soon.

And we beckon --- and we beckon ---- and we wait ---- and we rejoice ---
and we hope.

Getting ready for Christmas is a very distant second to getting ready for
Christ.

And Advent is all about getting ready for Christ.

The Christ child yes ----- but even more so ----- getting ready for the post resurrection Christ arrival.

You'll notice at the front here ---- this year we've got our --- "From the cradle to the cross." ---- display.

"From the cradle to the cross"----- come take a look after the service ---- Christ's life isn't segregated into separate events --- they all tell one great salvation story.

And we've got a beautiful wooden spiral candle holder here in the middle --- -- that we'll also use during Lent.

Advent begins a very beautiful and meaningful cycle ---- the life --- ministry --- death --- and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ --- the cradle to the cross.

And this cycle ---- this event ----- finds its completion at the end of time --- the Second Advent --- the second coming.

It starts with the cradle --- the crèche ---- the manger ----- it goes through the cross --- rises up out of the grave ----- and finds its completion when we see Him once again in glory --- at the end of time as we know it.

In the mean time --- we do as humans have always done --- we mark time --- we celebrate --- we enter into seasons --- celebrate them and come out of them.

Today we enter into the very beginning of the greatest story ever told.

The one whose completion we still await.

And we don't wait knowing exactly when it will reach its consummation.

Instead we wait --- we anticipate.

Instead we sometimes stumble along.

Impatient ---- sometimes hurried and harried.

Anxious --- eager ----- you know how you feel this time of year --- it's a time of mixed emotions for so many of us --- peace and but also so much more.

And we wait.

We anticipate.

We celebrate.

We sometimes mourn and grieve.

We wait.

We anticipate.

We celebrate.

We sometimes mourn and grieve.

We long for --- yearn.

And on goes the cycle of life.

Until one day --- it's different.

Until one day ----- He is here.

One day it's not only --- He is born --- or He is alive --- or He is Risen.

But one day it's He is here.

Now ---- again ---- finally.

Maybe not in our lifetime ---- probably not in our lifetime --- but who knows --- no one knows.

One day it will be ----- He is here ----- that will be uttered from human lips ----- not just He is born --- or He is Risen --- but ----- He is here.

Until then -----

We wait ----- we anticipate.

We celebrate.

We sometimes mourn and grieve.

We wait.

We anticipate.

We celebrate.

We long for --- we yearn.

We wait --- and wait --- and wait.

Oh come --- Oh come --- Emmanuel.

We wait --- until when --- no one knows.

Amen.