

## **29<sup>th</sup> November 2020 – ADVENT 1 – Chris’s Sermon**

Mark 13: 24-37

“...keep awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at the dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes. And what I say to you I say to all: keep awake...”

In our reading today, Jesus talks to his disciples about the need to be prepared – to be awake – to be watchful and alert. And, of course, this is a very appropriate message for us as well – especially at this time of the year. Today, on this first Sunday in the season of Advent, we begin our preparations – as we wait for the coming of the Lord.

Yes, today, on this first Sunday in the season of Advent (with less than one month to go until Christmas), we are encouraged to remain awake – watchful and alert.

As Benedict would say, Christ is born in the hearts of true believers – those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Christ is present in those who can see Christ in others and hear his wisdom on the lips of the faithful. Yes, again, we are reminded to remain awake – watchful and alert - ready to receive Christ when he comes.

Having said this, I think it’s important to acknowledge that this won’t always be easy – this can be quite hard to do, especially at this time of the year. In the weeks leading up to Christmas (as I say every year), it’s easy to become distracted. At this time of the year, we can become quite busy – writing our Christmas lists and attending to the shopping (there are presents to buy and food to prepare). Our preparations can involve spring cleaning and long days in the garden. (This is a common one for us.)

And, of course, the shopping centres are all playing the traditional Christmas jingles – and the Christmas ads on TV are gathering momentum. There’s a lot of background noise at this time of the year.

According to their online catalogue, Jb Hi Fi is offering huge savings on some of their PS4 games this year – the new Call of Duty game is out now, in time for Christmas (I’m sure you’ll all be lining up for that one) – and they’re offering 15% off all their gaming laptops (their HP Omen full HD laptop is on sale at the moment – for the bargain low price of \$2498).

And, for those of you who are interested, the My Deal online catalogue is offering huge savings on some of their water slides, as well. (The Bestway inflatable water slide and jumping castle pool playground is on sale at the moment – you can pick that one up for just \$1118. Yes, that’s over a thousand dollars for a water slide. And, the madness begins!

Don’t get me wrong - there’s nothing wrong with the trappings of the Christmas season – nothing wrong with the hype and celebrations and feasting and the sales. But, taken together, these activities and interests can become distractions.

We can become distracted by the business of the Christmas season.

And, as the days pass – as Christmas draws closer and closer – the pace tends to pick up – it becomes faster and faster. (And, it’s easy to be swept along – to become distracted.)

As Christians, as disciples, we believe that Advent is the time when we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ. Christmas is more than just a time of feasting and presents (video games and water slides) – and it's more than just a remembrance of something that happened 2000 years ago.

Christmas is the time when the fullness of God's love is given to us. Christmas is the gift that God gives each and every year. Once again, as Benedict would say, Christ is born in those who can see Christ in others and hear his wisdom on the lips of the faithful.

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Christ. But, what will this mean for us? A helpless babe, held in the arms of a loving mother – born into an indifferent world.

How is this nativity scene the foundation of our faith?

What will it mean to us this Christmas?

I don't believe that we are saved from sin and death. Thankfully, many of us are now moving beyond this fall/redemption theology. Personally, I don't think we are utterly sinful and wretched – I just don't believe that.

But, I do think Christmas can help to save us - from indifference and coldness – it can help to save us from sadness and despair and blindness. (At this time of the year, we are given the gift of hope – from the God who comes to us.)

Advent saves us from our human frailties. In a way, I think a God centred celebration of Christmas can save us from a shallow secular Christmas. Through the baby Jesus, through the love that he received and the love that he shared, we are shown love – we are invited to participate. In particular, we are shown that love can be born within us – making us valuable and worthy and rich and powerful. We are shown all these things in that one small baby.

At Christmas, we are shown that love is the greatest truth – and our most profound purpose.

Yes, beyond the shopping and the celebrations and the food – and all the other distractions of the Christmas hype, in this time of Advent, we prepare ourselves to receive the gift of love.

Indeed, today we are reminded that Advent is truly a time to prepare – a time to remain awake – watchful and alert.

Let us pray:

Giver of all gifts, you have made many promises to those who love you. As we await the birth of your greatest promise, your own son, help us to see the many ways in which he comes into our world – the many ways in which we find him today. Open our eyes and our hearts to the grace of this advent season so that we may prosper in goodness and holiness. Amen.