

First Sunday of Advent Nov. 27, 2022

Isaiah 2:1-5
Psalm 122:1-9
Romans 13:11-14
Matthew 24:36-44

Isaiah 2:1-5

In Advent, Christians anticipate the birth into the world of the long-awaited Holy Child in one of the lowliest places, a stable. And during this time, the prophet Isaiah invites us to reflect upon God's holy mountain. In going "up" to this sacred place above the hills, in making our way along the path, we learn what it is to learn God's ways. In doing the work of peace and eschewing war on all levels, we are transformed as we close the gap between ourselves as human beings and the divine. We are invited to hold the two—the high and the low, the transcendent and the immanent, the divine and the human—together. This reading from Isaiah reminds us of the importance of our participation in God's unfolding life, even while we wait.

- What kind of instruction might help us close the gap we perceive between God's high holy mountain and the lowly stable where Jesus was born?
- How do you imagine participating in God's unfolding life by walking in God's lighted pathways?

Psalm 122:1-9

This ancient song celebrating a pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem is filled with joy, as the psalmist envisions a path to the holy city of God. Even today, so many centuries after the era of the Psalms' composition, traveling to Jerusalem is exciting and illuminating and sometimes terrifying, with throngs of faithful from three major religious traditions converging and worshipping in this spiritually and historically significant place. The psalmist tells us that going to Jerusalem is a path of prayer, one that invites us to focus on justice, peace, and prosperity. At the beginning of Advent, we share in this excitement and the potential for our own arrival in God's holy place.

- In what ways might you practice peace in your life, your community, and the wider world?
- How do you envision peace? What would it look/feel like?

Romans 13:11-14

For Paul, being awake was linked to timely moral action. With salvation, the coming of Christ, close at hand, we are urged to transform ourselves, leaving behind practices that are morally problematic and embracing practices that are honorable, generous, and kind. This Advent, we are encouraged to take action so that we might be prepared for the arrival of God's light in the form of his son, Jesus.

- What are the works of darkness the Paul points toward? How do we lay them aside?
- How do we put on the armor of light in a positive sense, not simply by avoiding the works of darkness?

Matthew 24:36-44

Again, we are urged to be watchful and awake, for something exciting is coming. While we are unable to predict the future or claim certainty, we do know that there is going to be an arrival of mystery and marvelousness. Matthew's gospel invites us to hold the tension between our inability to see the future and our hopeful anticipation of that future by cultivating spiritual watchfulness.

- What is it like to be spiritually awake?
- How do we maintain this in anticipation of the coming of the Son of Man, which will mean spiritual fulfillment?