

**Sunday 30 November 2025**  
**Advent Sunday**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Isaiah 2:1-5**  
**NT: Romans 13:11-14**  
**Gp: Matthew 24:36-44**

One of the great trials of human life is waking up in the morning and putting the light on. Strange things happen to your eyes, and as you head towards the bathroom, you might easily bump into items on the way. Once you make it to the bathroom and wash your face, the world begins to make sense. The light which blinded you is now the light by which you see everything around you. 'Keep awake', says Jesus to his disciples today; keep your eyes open, for we do not know when the Son of Man will be coming. The Greek word used in chapter 24 and elsewhere is *Parousia*. There has been a tradition that engaged with these verses to refer to the end of time, to the second coming of Jesus. But why should we think – except for reasons of ecclesiastical and scholarly tradition – that *Parousia* means 'the second coming'? For apparently, the word *Parousia* means 'presence' as opposed to *apousia*, 'absence'; hence it denotes the arrival of someone not now present; and it is especially used in relation to the visit of a royal or official personage. Indeed, St Paul, writing to Romans, in our second reading, suggests 'now is the time', when we are to concentrate our attention and keep our eyes open; so, not the 'presence' which with any luck we don't have to worry about for a while, but the presence of the truth itself, pressing upon us, making room in our world, now and here, and helping us to see the world around us with greater clarity and vision even if it's slightly confusing at the start.

Perhaps then, the Gospel reading this morning is most naturally read, in its first-century Jewish context, not as a question about the 'second coming', but a question about Jesus coming or arriving in the sense of his actual enthronement as king, consequent upon the dethronement of the present powers that were occupying Jerusalem. So, in Advent, you might say, we go back to that time of waiting or as it has been said, we become Jews again. We relearn the lessons of the first covenant. Like the Hebrew prophets, we turn our attention to the universal longing for God; and Isaiah's passage today reminds us that the call of Israel has as its fundamental objective the rescue and restoration of the entire creation. Not to see this connection is to fail to understand the meaning of Israel's fundamental doctrine of God, whom we cannot make, and the doctrine of Israel's election. What God intended to do to or for the nations, he would do in some sense or other through Israel. The fate of the gentile nations would hinge upon the fate of Israel, 'for out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem', Isaiah says.

The gospel reading, then, is in a sense about the fulfilment of this promise in Christ. For us now, whose trust is in Christ Jesus, what there is to look forward to is always the fulfilment of a promise. That is why we open our eyes. At the very heart of all our thinking about

Advent, the coming and presence of Jesus in our midst, ought to be that conviction of promise. We know the one in whom we have believed and trusted and so as the world's history unfolds, we lift our heads and think of promise. We know the one who is coming is the one in whom we put our trust.

None of this is easy to express in a world which quite likes clarity, boundaries and certainties, because the trust that Isaiah puts for us where all nations 'shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks', where God binds all things together as arbiter between the nations is counter intuitive. It does not look very much as if it's happening, and it would be nice to know if we want to know anything exactly when we might expect it. Of course, as we all know, some Christians throughout the ages have been very readily seduced in providing a series of inaccurate answers to this question, despite severe warnings from our Lord, as we heard today, that we do not know the hour. Rather, the gospel is always addressed to 'this generation', as Jesus put it. Every generation sees the beginning of the end, so to speak; for, as T.S. Elliot put it, the 'end' is always 'the beginning'. The consequence of self-made chaos, and human sin, is always beginning again, here and now. Just watch the news or stand outside for half an hour. And in every generation, the word is the same to believers: 'keep watch', 'open your eyes', salvation is close at hand.

We could get this wrong too. We might say that we, as Christians, have been given the secret of the happy ending, and so we can boast around the miseries of the world with a cheeky smile. Religious people can give in to that temptation far too often, and not only religious people. Indeed, it seems that we might be at a point of genuine cultural crisis in the West generally, where we are in danger of being strangled and stifled by what we think is knowledge and expertise. We are bound into short term problem solving anxious control-oriented policies; it's making us diseased, both on the Right and the Left of our politics. This is also true in Higher Education, in which my colleague Steven Shakespeare and I are involved. Responding to a great deal of these crises begins not in asking what will make us happy, but beginning with attention, in getting used to 'waiting and watching', not with a pre-prepared agenda, but letting our minds and imagination really be shaped by who and what you see. That is what our institutions are called to do too.

If we as Christians have a secret, that secret does not make us any safer than anyone else. Rather, it allows us to open our eyes, be expectant, compassionate, and more willing to grow in the truth of Christ. This means meeting him in every moment we encounter, every person we encounter, not shutting our eyes against the needs of others, as if we are unaffected, but serving him, living with him and in him here and now, and allowing his spirit to work with us and in us. You might say that the Holy Spirit is the real secret of our readings today. The promise of the Father in the New Testament is the Holy Spirit. When Isaiah says that 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore', it's the Holy Spirit at work. It's the spirit which removes 'the dullness of our blinded sight', as the hymn says, as we keep awake, gazing on Jesus and through Jesus, to the

Father. Just as we pray for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, we pray for the coming of the Bride, in Advent. That is at the heart, surely, of our preparation for the celebration of the Incarnation at Christmas.

We so, because a Word has been spoken, and it was not just a text or a theory; for the gap between God and humanity, so powerfully preserved in the Hebrew scriptures, cannot be bridged simply by ideas, but only by historical action; not by a theory, but a community of love and worship kept together by the unexpected utterly surprising appearance of love in flesh. If we keep Advent faithfully, we might learn how to meet Christ as a renewing surprise, when we acknowledge our urge to idolatry, as the Prophets of Israel kept reminding us. As we come to receive him this morning, we receive that mystery of absolute grace and freedom that brings our idolatry to the hour of judgment. Here our hunger is met, and here we are loved and fed into everlasting life in bread and wine.

**Fr Yazid Said**