

**First Sunday of Advent, November 30, 2025**

**Hope That Shines: Awake to the Dawn**

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Friends, this morning the sun rose quietly over the hills of upstate New York. Maybe we didn't see it, since it was cloudy this morning. But there it was, faithful as always. The long nights of November are giving way to the gentler light of December. And in this turning of the seasons, the Church says, "Welcome to Advent."

Today, as we light the first candle of Advent — the Candle of Hope, flickering against the shadows — we embark on a sacred journey toward Christmas. It's the season when nights grow longer, yet lights begin to appear on windows, trees, and streets — each small flame pushing back the darkness. Advent doesn't start with trumpets or fanfare, but with hope for dawn and our preparedness to wake. The world hasn't changed overnight, but a single flame can remind us: morning is approaching.

**1. Historical: A Dawn Imagined in the Dark — Isaiah 2:1–5**

Isaiah speaks to a people deeply acquainted with anxiety — surrounded by rising empires, political upheaval, and war. He once saw such a light long before Christ was born. He lived in a time of fear and war, when nations were arming themselves, when people worried about tomorrow, and fear ruled the day.

And yet, in the midst of war talk and weary hearts, Isaiah looked ahead and saw something others could not see: he dared to describe the world as God intends it to be — a mountain bathed in God's light, nations streaming upward not to fight but to learn peace.

Isaiah is not describing the world as it was, but as it *will* be. Hope often begins as a vision before it becomes reality. And that's what Advent is: a season where we let God's future interrupt our present fears. Isaiah teaches us this: **when everything looks dark, God plants a dawn.**

In the vision we just heard, Isaiah saw something beautiful:

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Imagine that.

Tools once used for harm — turned into instruments that grow food and sustain life. It's as if God says, “Enough of tearing down. Let's start planting again.”

It's an earthy vision. A grounded vision. A peace that doesn't float above real life but grows from the soil: hearts softened, soil turned, the quiet work of sowing hope in dark places. Isaiah's picture isn't only for a distant future; it's a call to begin now.

That's why he ends with:

**“Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”**

Don't just wait for peace — walk in it. Live it. Bring it.

And when we look around today, it's easy to wonder if peace is possible.

We hear of wars across the globe.

We see communities divided.

We notice tension that creeps into our own families, our schools, even our own hearts.

And yet Isaiah whispers to us across the centuries:

**“Look again. The dawn is coming.”**

## 2. Gospel: Awake to the Dawn — Matthew 24:36–44

If Isaiah invites us to imagine God’s dawn, Jesus invites us to *wake up* for it.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples something startling:

No one knows the hour. Not the angels. Not even the Son. Only the Father.

The point is not fear — it’s attentiveness. Jesus says the coming of the Son of Man will be like the sunrise you weren’t watching for, the knock you didn’t expect, the moment when the ordinary suddenly becomes holy.

Advent is not about predicting the future; it’s about staying awake in the present.

Jesus warns that the danger is not that we will commit some enormous sin, but that we will fall asleep to God’s presence — lulled by routine, distracted by worry, numbed by the noise around us. Just as Isaiah’s people waited for the Messiah, we now wait for Christ’s coming again — not just in glory someday, but also in the quiet moments of every day.

People in Noah’s time weren’t wickedly plotting—they were eating, drinking, marrying, living life. In other words, they were asleep to the deeper story God was writing.

And in this season, Jesus asks us:

Are you awake?

Do you see the hints of dawn at the edges of your life?

Are you ready to live with hope even when the world feels dim?

The first task of Advent is not decorating, shopping, or planning.

It is **waking up**.

## 3. Hope That Shines

Hope is not optimism.

Optimism says, “Things will probably get better.”

Hope says, “Even if they don’t, God’s light is already on the way.”

Hope is not wishful thinking.

Hope is the stubborn belief that God is at work in the dark, long before we see the first glimmer of light.

Hope is like a candle — small, fragile, easily overlooked — yet it refuses to let the darkness have the last word.

And that’s what Advent gives us:

A stubborn, flickering, holy hope.

A hope that grows as we pray.

A hope that strengthens as we act.

A hope that shines because God is faithful.

#### **4. Walking in the Light**

Isaiah invites us: “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

Jesus invites us: “Stay awake.”

These are not two different messages; they are the same.

To walk in God’s light *is* to stay awake.

To stay awake *is* to live with hope.

To have hope *is* to live as though dawn is already touching the horizon.

So how do we walk in that light?

- By choosing peace in small ways, in a softened word, a reconciled relationship, a courageous truth.
- By refusing to let despair write our story.
- By noticing God's presence in everyday moments, moments of kindness, a sunrise, a child's laughter, a candle lit against the dark.
- By living now as the people, we believe God is shaping us to be.

### **Conclusion: Awake to Dawn**

Friends, the nights may still be long, and the world may still feel heavy. But the first candle is lit.

The promise is given. The dawn is nearer today than it was yesterday.

So this Advent, as we step into the growing light, may we dare to see the world as God sees it.

May we stay awake to God's quiet movements among us.

May we carry hope like a lantern through every dark valley.

For the One who comes is faithful.

The dawn is on its way.

And hope, which is real, radiant, and a stubborn hope, shines still.

**Amen.**