

ADVENT WEEK 1

Keep Awake Therefore



Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

MATTHEW 24:42



WE OFTEN HEAR ADVENT is a time for “getting ready.” But getting ready for what? The most common response is “Christmas ... Jesus’ birthday.” And, yes, that is true. There are gifts to be bought; decorations to be hung; cookies to be baked—all of which are signs of preparing for a great birthday party.

But as the readings at the beginning of Advent make clear, this season is not about re-living the past, pretending that we are

getting ready for Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. Jesus was already born in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. His birth inaugurated a new moment in history, the beginning of God’s reign—sometimes also called the Kingdom of God. In his preaching, he announced God’s dream for our world. In his healing miracles, he gave us a glimpse of what it would look like. In the way he ate, he let us know God’s kingdom would be like a feast at which all were welcome. In the way he prayed, he taught us to long (as he did) for

God's dream to be realized here on earth as it already was in the heavens. All that the Christian Gospels record happened a long time ago. We are not waiting for Jesus.

What we are still waiting for in 2019 is the Kingdom of God that Jesus came for to be fully realized, because—quite frankly—it has not. Jesus has been born in Bethlehem, but—in the words of the medieval saint Meister Eckhart—he's not yet been born in our hearts. God is still waiting for us to collaborate wholeheartedly with God's vision, like Jesus did. Still waiting for each and every one of us to say, "Hey, let me lend my gifts and talents to help make the world the kind of place that You, God, dream it to be."

The great birthday party that we are supposed to be getting ready for in this season is a birthday party for the Kingdom of God. And the signs that we are getting ready for *that* party are not gifts and decorations and cookies, but rather, the kinds of signs that Jesus did in his lifetime: teaching and healing and feeding people and praying.

Although it may sound odd to say, for those of us in Catholic health care, *every day* is lived in the season of Advent. The very reason why we have Catholic hospitals and nursing homes and clinics in the first place is that *we* want the world to look like the place that God dreams it to be, and are willing to contribute our time and energy, sweat and tears, specifically to the healing dimension of that larger vision. Every act of care that we offer to a patient, every morsel of food we spoon, every bed pan we clean, every shot we give, every bit of research we contribute, every community partnership we build, every move we make toward alleviating suffering and creating well-being is a way we are doing our part in "getting ready" for the Kingdom of God.

This Advent, let's open our hearts more and more to Jesus' message and recommit ourselves through our daily work to help bring the Kingdom of God about. There is no better way to get ready for Christmas.

