

**A Sermon for the 1st Sunday of Advent
November 30, 2025**



St Andrew

Come to New Life!

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Click Here for today's Readings:

[First Sunday of Advent – The Episcopal Church](#)

Matthew 24:36-44, Matthew 4:18-22

Keep awake!

Today we enter the beautiful season of Advent with lots of Scottish flourishes, for it is also the Feast Day of Saint Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland. In Andrew's story of encountering Jesus, there was an element of surprise – the Gospel of Matthew says that Andrew and his brother Peter were just minding their own business, casting nets into the sea to fish. Jesus spotted them both and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." And they did – immediately dropped their nets and followed Jesus. That wasn't the way they thought their day would go, but they had no doubt that they should follow Jesus. All plans changed.

This is a good story for Advent, as is the Matthew reading for the first Sunday in Advent, when Jesus warns his disciples to be alert, for they do not know on what day their Lord is coming – that is, COMING BACK. Andrew and Peter were surprised the first time Jesus entered their lives, and they'll be even more surprised at Jesus' second coming.

All the gospel readings, in all three liturgical years, start with this rather terrifying warning and tell us to be alert. Keep awake! This is, of course, totally out of step with our secular culture, which advises us to keep awake for special sales. We church folk have some charming traditions for the 24 days of Advent, and the merchants have glommed on to some of them, confusing the 24 days of Advent with 24 shopping days.

Do you have some special Advent traditions in your homes? I certainly do. The most important thing for me is staying in touch with my friends. This year I am writing 85 Christmas notes with cards. As you know, I have lived in a lot of places, and I have collected dear friends everywhere I have lived. Fifteen of the cards are going to Europe, where I lived for ten years in Germany and acquired all the German traditions, including the celebration of Saint Nicholas on December 6. Swedish friends taught me about Santa Lucia. We will be celebrating both of those saints close to their feast days, in the next two weeks. What joyous preparation! We celebrate both the First and Second Comings of Christ, and we live between those events. So, yes, Advent is about Christmas too, only we are urged to practice delayed gratification.

I've told you this little story before, so please indulge me. I imagine going merrily to the mall, with Christmas carols in the air, sales and enticements everywhere, when suddenly, John the Baptist grabs the PA system mic and shrieks, "You brood of vipers!" A surprising reminder that we should take these precious days seriously.

So how can we do that? There are lots of frivolous things we might do – and I do! – including home decorations, lighting displays, cookie baking, meal planning, and special entertainment such as attending The Nutcracker ballet. All of that is good, especially if

we keep in mind that there are many people less fortunate than we are. All of you are incredibly generous with your donations to our parish projects, this year providing toys for the families of veterans. Many organizations will be asking for help with their own good works, such as the Salvation Army and other charities, and I'm sure you respond to such appeals too.

But for me, at any rate, I take this season as an opportunity for a closer relationship with God. Norm and I have morning prayer time all the time, but during Advent, we kick it into high gear. We mark this short season of preparation with special readings, such as the C.S. Lewis-inspired pamphlets you can find in the parlor, perhaps the Forward Day By Day pamphlet to augment your prayer time. I find this season a rewarding time to step into the dark, shut out all the shouting, and light up candles. In our prayer room, we light Advent candles. Here at church we mark the weeks of Advent with a wreath of candles, a signal that time is progressing for the coming of our Lord. The wreath gets brighter with candlelight as we come closer to Christmas. On Christmas Eve this space will be ablaze with candlelight in the Taize tradition. All the music will be quiet, accompanied by classical guitar. We will gather in wonder, as our Nativity set is finally complete, when we will see the babe in the manger.