SUNDAY SCHOOL · DISCUSSION & PREPARATION

# First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2026 · Year B · **Mark 13:24–37**

AN ATTITUDE OF DISCIPLESHIP

## Hopeful

FOCUS QUESTION

What are we waiting for: you this Advent, and St. John's, 281 years into keeping watch?

*"Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come."*

MARK 13:33 (NRSV)

## Before Sunday

Read the appointed lessons a day at a time. Come ready to share one thing that caught you.

**Monday** · Isaiah 64:1–9

**Tuesday** · Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19

**Wednesday** · 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

**Thursday–Saturday** · Mark 13:24–37

## Word of Life · *Reading Mark 13*

Mark 13 is the "Little Apocalypse." It gathers the Old Testament's "day of the Lord" images: a darkened sun and falling stars (vv. 24–25), Daniel's Son of Man coming in the clouds (v. 26), the elect gathered from the four winds (v. 27). It was spoken to a young church under persecution. The suffering is real. It is not the last word.

1. What pictures come to mind when you hear "the Second Coming"? Where did you pick them up? Which trouble you, and which comfort you?

2. Last Sunday we confessed Christ the King. Today the King is coming. How does a King crowned with thorns change what his coming “in power and glory” might look like?

Jesus gives two pictures of hopeful watching: the fig tree whose tender branch announces summer (v. 28), and the doorkeeper who stays awake while the owner is away (vv. 34–36).

3. Anyone who has farmed or gardened in Cabarrus County knows how to read a season. What signs of God’s coming do you notice: in the world, in our community, here at St. John’s?
4. Each servant is given “his work,” and the doorkeeper is told to watch. Who are the doorkeepers at St. John’s? What is your work while the master is away?

Mark uses this word for “watch” again in Gethsemane (14:32–42), where the disciples fall asleep. The parable’s four watches match the Passion: evening (the Supper), midnight (the arrest), cockcrow (Peter’s denial), morning (the trial, and finally the empty tomb). The Lord comes, but by way of a cross.

5. Between the Christmas Market, pageant practice and family gatherings, what lulls you to sleep in December?
6. The disciples fail to watch, and Jesus keeps watch for them anyway. Why is that good news for those of us who doze off?

## Word Among Us · *Waiting at St. John’s*

Nobody likes to wait. We live by the drive-thru, two-day shipping and the microwave. Yet the church begins its new year with four weeks of waiting.

1. Where will you wait this week? Name a real line, a real waiting room, a real “please hold.”

The saints in our churchyard wait with us. For 281 years this congregation has laid its dead to rest in sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Every grave out there is a sermon on verse 27.

2. Walk the cemetery this week, or bring to mind someone buried there. What does it mean that we wait alongside them, not apart from them?

For some, Advent is pure excitement: preschoolers counting down the days, the wreath growing brighter each week. For others it is an empty chair, a first Christmas without someone, or worship watched on a livestream from home.

3. Who in our congregation will find this season lonely? What could our class do before Christmas: a card, a visit, a phone call?
4. Preschool families walk our halls every weekday. How might we wait alongside them this

Advent?

Writing from a Nazi prison cell, Dietrich Bonhoeffer compared Advent to that cell: one waits and hopes and paces, but the door "can only be opened from the outside." Luther says the same of faith: not by my own understanding or strength. Every Sunday we confess we are "captive to sin and cannot free ourselves."

5. Where have you tried to open the door from the inside? What changes when you trust that God opens it?
6. How might waiting, the thing we hate, become a gift to you this Advent?

**PRAYER**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. Wake us from sleep, keep us watchful in hope, and open the doors we cannot open ourselves. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

**DIG DEEPER**

Isaiah 64:1–9: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down."

**LAST WORD**

Each time you wait this week, pray: *Come, Lord Jesus.* Then pray for someone who waits alone.