

First Sunday in Advent

A Message from Fr. Mark

Happy New Year! Today is the first Sunday of Advent, which is the first day of the church's liturgical year. This coming year we will hear readings from the Gospel of Matthew every Sunday. So, as we launch into this new year, we are also launching into a year of study of the Gospel of Matthew, which is the first book of the New Testament, the first Gospel and also "the most important book ever written" (Ernst Renan).

Today, our Gospel reading is not from the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. At the end of Advent, we will hear readings from the first Chapter of Matthew which will prepare us to celebrate the coming of Jesus at Christmas. At the beginning of Advent, we hear readings that help us prepare for the coming of Jesus at the end of time.

Jesus makes it clear that we cannot know when the end of the world will come: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So, will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come." (Matthew 24:37-42)

The Greek word for "left" (aphietai) is a word that means "forsaken" or "abandoned." It does not mean "left behind." The phrase "left behind" was added by American evangelicals in the 19th Century who invented the idea of the "rapture". According to Catholic teaching, Christ will come at the end of the world to bring his saints to their heavenly reward, and the others will begin their eternal separation from God. We do not believe that the world will continue or that some people will be "left behind" on earth to suffer tribulation.

This year we will learn that St. Matthew's Gospel is the most "Jewish" of the four Gospels. He often quotes from the Old Testament and compares Jesus to Old Testament figures. That is why today we hear about Noah. The story of the flood is a reminder that we should always be prepared for the day of the Lord's coming!