

SUNDAYS AND SEASONS
PREACHING
YEAR A 2023

Sundays and Seasons: Preaching 2023, Year A

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Lectionary Conversion Chart

Time after Pentecost, Year A, 2023

If today is it falls within this date range.	The "lectionary" number assigned to this date range in <i>Evangelical Lutheran Worship</i> is which is equivalent to "proper ____" in other printed lectionaries.	In 2023, this Sunday is the "____ Sunday after Pentecost."
Sunday, June 11 (if after Holy Trinity)	Sunday between June 5 & 11	Lectionary 10	5	2nd
Sunday, June 18 (if after Holy Trinity)	Sunday between June 12 & 18	Lectionary 11	6	3rd
Sunday, June 25 (if after Holy Trinity)	Sunday between June 19 & 25	Lectionary 12	7	4th
Sunday, July 2	Sunday between June 26 & July 2	Lectionary 13	8	5th
Sunday, July 9	Sunday between July 3 & 9	Lectionary 14	9	6th
Sunday, July 16	Sunday between July 10 & 16	Lectionary 15	10	7th
Sunday, July 23	Sunday between July 17 & 23	Lectionary 16	11	8th
Sunday, July 30	Sunday between July 24 & 30	Lectionary 17	12	9th
Sunday, August 6	Sunday between July 31 & Aug 6	Lectionary 18	13	10th
Sunday, August 13	Sunday between Aug 7 & 13	Lectionary 19	14	11th
Sunday, August 20	Sunday between Aug 14 & 20	Lectionary 20	15	12th
Sunday, August 27	Sunday between Aug 21 & 27	Lectionary 21	16	13th
Sunday, September 3	Sunday between Aug 28 & Sept 3	Lectionary 22	17	14th
Sunday, September 10	Sunday between Sept 4 & 10	Lectionary 23	18	15th
Sunday, September 17	Sunday between Sept 11 & 17	Lectionary 24	19	16th
Sunday, September 24	Sunday between Sept 18 & 24	Lectionary 25	20	17th
Sunday, October 1	Sunday between Sept 25 & Oct 1	Lectionary 26	21	18th
Sunday, October 8	Sunday between Oct 2 & 8	Lectionary 27	22	19th
Sunday, October 15	Sunday between Oct 9 & 15	Lectionary 28	23	20th
Sunday, October 22	Sunday between Oct 16 & 22	Lectionary 29	24	21st
Sunday, October 29	Sunday between Oct 23 & 29	Lectionary 30	25	22nd
Sunday, November 5	Sunday between Oct 30 & Nov 5	Lectionary 31	26	23rd
Sunday, November 12	Sunday between Nov 6 & 12	Lectionary 32	27	24th
Sunday, November 19	Sunday between Nov 13 & 19	Lectionary 33	28	25th
Christ the King, Nov 26	Sunday between Nov 20 & 26	Lectionary 34	29	Last



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Preface

Welcome to the 2023 edition of *Sundays and Seasons: Preaching*. We trust you will find real help here for your preaching task in year A of the Revised Common Lectionary.

At its best, what sets *Preaching* apart from similar resources is its holistic approach. The vision promoted in *The Use of the Means of Grace, Principles for Worship*, and *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*¹ is that the sermon is not a discrete event but something woven into the whole of the day, arising from and commenting on all that precedes and follows: the liturgy, the communion meal, the scripture readings, the church-year day, the day in the civic calendar, and the current context of those gathered for worship.

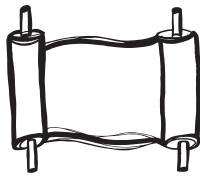
First we present a brief introduction to the day and to the texts. (Print users will find the citations and brief thumbnails; online users can click to the complete texts.) With these, we list the psalm response to the first reading, the gospel acclamation, and the prayer of the day—pieces that make up the propers for the day. Then the contributions of Gail Ramshaw include *Readings in the Bible*, describing the circumstances in which these texts were written; *Readings on This Day*, connecting the texts to the day in the church year and the context for preaching on this day, in this place; *Images in the Readings*; and *Connections with the Liturgy*.

The heart of this resource follows with two essays: *From a Scholar* and *From a Preacher*. The writers of the scholar essays provide insights into the biblical texts for the day, focusing on what would be particularly helpful to you, the person preparing the day's sermon. In the preacher essays, people who share with you the regular preaching task take all that has been gathered together—the entirety of the worship—and propose approaches for compelling sermons. The purpose of these essays, as individual as the pastors writing them, is to inspire your creativity in preaching the gospel to the people in your context.

We are grateful to you for making this resource a vital tool for your preaching. Thanks also to the many leaders who contributed to this volume; and to God, who calls and gathers the church and sends us out to love and serve our neighbors.

Laurie J. Hanson
General editor

¹ Primarily produced with an eye toward Lutheran worship, *Sundays and Seasons: Preaching* refers to *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, the primary worship book of the ELCA and the ELCIC. However, it is built around the Revised Common Lectionary, so it can be useful to preachers in many Protestant congregations.



Preaching Matthew in Year A

Matthew poses numerous challenges for preachers, especially anyone who expects predictability or a consistently soothing voice from the gospels. Some weeks the lectionary serves up pure grace and calming reassurance, such as when Jesus kindly redirects people who possess only “little faith” or promises the crowds that his “yoke is easy” and his “burden is light” (11:30). Other weeks we read frightening overtures of harsh judgment, especially when someone’s hypocrisy or lack of preparedness comes into view. In multiple parables people who seemed to be on the right track find themselves disowned or thrown into “the outer darkness,” where they are beset by “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

It’s not that this gospel can’t make up its mind; rather, we should understand Matthew as a narrative capable of offering guidance to believers dwelling in complicated and often threatening terrain. Matthew knows that being the church is not easy. Many perils accompany the kingdom of heaven as it breaks in—threats not merely associated with demonic beings but also close to home in counterfeit believers, unwillingness to forgive others, and misguided leaders. To orient readers as followers of a merciful Christ who summons his people to make disciples in a world brimming with conflict and misunderstanding, Matthew issues consolations on some pages and warnings on others. The stakes are high.

Matthew remembers Jesus and his ministry with a persistent confidence in Jesus’ utter trustworthiness and the wide and amazing extent of God’s embrace. Yes, oppressive religious leadership and bogus devotion can do great harm, especially when the casualties are people whose own faith is fragile and not yet fully formed—in other words, almost everyone who calls the church their home. But Matthew frames Jesus’ public ministry—between the devil’s wilderness tests at the outset and the beginning of the passion narrative in Jerusalem—with two vital statements about divine graciousness: the beatitudes (5:1-12) and the story about “sheep” from among the nations who are surprised to learn that generosity toward those in need is solidarity with Jesus himself (25:31-46). Preachers do well to remember that this gospel’s urgency and occasional severity derive from a concern that the church might underestimate God’s commitment to bless the poor in spirit and might draw its ecclesial circles too small. Leave room to wonder at the immensity of divine grace, from the mysterious magi who through

their own cultural wisdom discern its pull (2:1-12), to a Messiah who promises to protect those who share in his risky ministry (10:24-42), to the workers in the vineyard whose pay is not what they earn but what they deserve in God’s peculiar, justice-oriented economy (20:1-16).

The intensity and urgency that pulse through Matthew’s story of Jesus—to say nothing of its especially stern criticisms of Jesus’ peers the Pharisees—suggest that the narrative was written to equip believers to live boldly and graciously in a context of heightened anxiety, fierce religious disagreement, and all-around polarization. That makes it especially suitable for preaching the good news today. Matthew gives preachers opportunities to help congregations avoid being overly eager to keep track of who’s really on their side and who’s not. Matthean preaching should steer a church away from placing its trust in its own heritage or its privileged status. It should put a mirror before us to illuminate our own hypocrisy every time we ache to see our opponents get their just deserts.

Paying attention to a few of Matthew’s most prominent themes in the lectionary’s year A assignments helps preachers discover continuity from week to week and stokes the creative process that allows this particular gospel to speak to our current social contexts.

Israel’s Messiah, Israel’s Hopes

From its opening genealogy to its frequent explicit citations of Hebrew Scripture, to its focus on obeying the Mosaic Law as a means of encountering God’s promises of life and wholeness, Matthew situates the story of Jesus in the piety, expectations, and sometimes disorderly long-running history of God’s chosen people. Jesus comes as God’s promised ruler to Israel, as one who will fulfill long-standing hopes and bring God’s intentions to full flower. Matthew reminds Christian congregations that the good news is first and foremost a statement about divine faithfulness to God’s covenant people and then by extension to the wider world. No one can read Matthew and decide that the Hebrew Scriptures do not matter or have become passé. Rather, through Jesus, we find ourselves situated in a larger, older story.

Of course, Matthew also calls attention to Jesus as a divisive figure in his Jewish setting. Accordingly, Matthew ratchets up the intensity of Jesus’ disgust toward Pharisees, especially

in comparison to Mark and Luke. Some of the narrative's ill will probably reflects the context in which this gospel was written, perhaps bearing witness to lingering late-first-century acrimony between Christian congregations and Jews who did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. In any case, the conflict Matthew describes between Jesus and other interpreters of the law needs to be seen for what it likely was originally—an intra-Jewish dispute about important matters related to faithful living and communal order. Christians perpetuate longstanding sins against our Jewish neighbors when we use Matthew to denigrate Judaism as legalistic or dedicated to “works righteousness” and when we employ the word *Pharisee* as a synonym for hypocrite. Those moves are both historical errors and distortions of what it means to be Jewish. Often preachers need to point out where Matthean passages have been deployed through history in anti-Jewish ways and to characterize Jesus' criticisms as directed against hypocritical or self-congratulatory religious leadership, not Judaism in general. Moreover, there is plenty one could say about that kind of leadership in Christian settings today.

Teaching and Forgiving

In Matthew's account, teaching occupies a large share of Jesus' public ministry. There are five main clusters of teaching material (chapters 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–25) in which Jesus interprets Torah, issues warnings, instructs his followers with parables and commands, and cautions the church to be faithful and prepared as it awaits his return.

As is true in all the gospels, Jesus' teachings do not stand separate from the healings, exorcisms, and other wondrous deeds he performs. Together his various activities typify the kingdom of heaven. He announces, describes, enacts, and demonstrates what this new state of affairs is all about—a new lived reality in which God's intentions for the world are bursting into being. Jesus weighs in on various controversies and presents himself as an authorized and reliable interpreter of the Law of Moses and a wise sage who is confident of God's care for God's creation. His teachings often provoke or perpetuate conflict with his opponents, usually other teachers of the law whose positions and practices he regards as misguided or predatory.

Matthew also shines a light on forgiveness. Jesus brings forgiveness about. An angel tells Joseph that Jesus “will save his people from their sins” (1:21). During Jesus' last supper he explicitly connects forgiveness of sins to the pouring out of his blood (26:28). Likewise, he teaches his followers to be generous in forgiving others. The church he envisions will take steps to care for its vulnerable members, resolve its internal conflicts, and practice forgiveness (18:1-35). The kingdom of heaven enacted in Jesus' deeds and teachings brings benefits to people now, accomplishing forgiveness and forging new relationships. Jesus instructs his followers to make those same things part of their common life.

Matthew won't let us forget that Jesus' teachings recognize the struggles associated with the kingdom of heaven's arrival. Jesus is helping his audience perceive something they have not fully experienced before, and he is also equipping his followers, the church, for ministry in his absence. After all, one of the things he finally commissions his followers to do is to carry on his ministry of teaching (28:20).

Parables

To prepare to preach from Matthew, preachers must prepare to preach about parables. Parables are part of the story in eleven of the Matthean texts assigned during the twenty-six Sundays in the time after Pentecost during year A.

In parables Jesus urges us to reframe our perceptions about the world, human interactions, values, and fairness. Because the kingdom of heaven is about the emergence of a transformed society and not merely an improved society, Jesus teaches with short narratives that undercut our expectations about how things are supposed to work. The good news is so irresistibly good—and persistent—that it should lead people to extraordinary acts of desire and devotion. It exposes the deadly effects of arrogant, complacent, and self-satisfied religion.

Preachers ought to resist the temptation to explain a parable or otherwise treat it as a code to unlock in order to discover a single theological truth. A better goal is to help a congregation experience a parable and allow the odd story to propel us toward deeper reflection on the scandal of grace, the dangers of our presumptions, or the subversive character of the kingdom of heaven. The outrageousness, exaggeration, and shock that are part of many parables stir up emotions and invite us to compare our own expectations, hopes, and disappointments with what we encounter in Jesus. God's ways are not our ways. The parables remind us of that over and over when we read them well, learning from others who encounter those stories differently.

Judgment

Jesus speaks of “the end of the age” in Matthew, and there are more mentions of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” than any conscientious preacher wishes there were. In effect, Matthew compels preachers to explore biblical imagery about judgment and punishment with their congregations. This is, of course, difficult in settings in which people have given up on—or never seriously considered—the idea that God's judgment is actually compatible with divine love. It falls to preachers to consider that the transformation brought by the kingdom of heaven must go beyond simply not holding our sin against us. The kingdom will necessitate a re-creation, or at least a purification. It is not clear that Matthew puts forth a notion of divine retribution or that it revels in the suffering of those who are evil, false, or foolish. But the gospel does suggest that the causes and effects of sin will need to be scrubbed away somehow—by divine and

not human housecleaning—if indeed humanity’s common life will ever happen in a safe enough environment so the meek can inherit the earth without having to watch their backs. There are reasons the Herods and Pilates of this world deploy their power so ruthlessly to try to eliminate the Messiah. They know as well as Matthew that the stakes remain high.

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Advent

ADVENT | CHRISTMAS | TIME AFTER EPIPHANY





Preaching in Advent

Advent is a season of waiting. “Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7, Advent 3). As we declare good news, let us encourage people to slow down, take notice, and wait. Is there teaching about meditation or prayer that can be included in your homilies? Would it be helpful to insert moments of silence into your preaching so that the congregation can hear and feel what silence “sounds” like?

As we remind people, “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (Matt. 24:44, Advent 1), how might we inspire folks to prepare a radical welcome for Jesus in our homes, churches, and societies? Just as Joseph had to overcome disbelief and societal expectations to do as the angel commanded him, taking Mary as his wife (Matt. 1:24, Advent 4), how can we help our children, youth, and families prioritize Jesus during this Advent season?

Let us particularly honor children, not as the church of tomorrow, but of today. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of a baby who changed the world, how will our families “see the glory of the LORD, [and] the majesty of our God” (Isa. 35:2, Advent 3)? Perhaps you will uplift the prayer we offer for the newly baptized, “Sustain them with the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence” (*ELW*, p. 231; Isa. 11:2-3, Advent 2).

As we reflect upon baptism, remember that we “proclaim Christ in word and deed, in care for others and the world God made, and in work for justice and peace” (*ELW*, p. 228).

Romans 15 says, “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another. . . . Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom. 15:5, 7, Advent 2). As those who announce God’s word, let us entreat others to repent, confess, make reparation, and seek reconciliation. In the words of John the Baptist, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 3:2, Advent 2). How is God challenging us to bravely resist the individual, corporate, and systemic sin that has so easily beset us in the form of racism, sexism, homophobia, and the like?

As preachers we must contextualize our prophetic witness to our neighborhoods. We are also entreated to speak boldly about how we have historically associated light with holiness and darkness with sin. You may use the entire Romans 13 pericope for fodder. For example, “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:11-12, Advent 1). Let us contemplate how our Indigenous neighbors, and those of color, hear these kinds of messages during the Advent season. Is there a way to preach so that you intentionally extol *holy darkness* and the partnership of God’s darkness and light throughout the cosmos? Will you paint a picture of Jesus as a brown-skinned, Palestinian, Jewish baby boy? How might this imagery arouse your congregation to reimagine the unity of the human family and our obligations to one another?



November 27, 2022

First Sunday of Advent

The new church year begins with a wake-up call: Christ is coming soon! In today's readings both Paul and Jesus challenge us to wake from sleep, for we know neither the day nor the hour of the Lord's coming. Isaiah proclaims the day when God will gather all people on the holy mountain and there will be no more war or suffering. Though we vigilantly watch for the promised day of salvation, we wait for what we already have: Christ comes among us this day as the word and meal that strengthen our faith in the promises of God.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection save us from the threatening dangers of our sins, and enlighten our walk in the way of your salvation, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Readings and Responses

Isaiah 2:1-5

The visionary message presented in this reading focuses on a future day when God establishes a universal reign of peace. Divine decisions will make war obsolete, and the worshipping community responds: "Let us walk in the light of that LORD now!"

Response: Psalm 122

Romans 13:11-14

Paul compares the advent of Christ to the coming of dawn. We live our lives today in light of Christ's coming in the future.

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. Alleluia. (Ps. 85:7)

Matthew 24:36-44

Jesus describes his second coming as a sudden, turbulent event that will bring about deep change to our normal, day-to-day lives. Therefore, he urges people to stay awake, be aware, and wait expectantly, because the Son of Man will come unannounced.

The Readings in the Bible

Matthew 24:36-44

The Gospel of Matthew was probably written in the mid-80s CE as an elaboration on Mark's gospel. In Matthew 24, a chapter shortly before the beginning of the Matthean passion, Jesus alerts his hearers to the coming of the Son of Man, who will arrive unexpectedly to judge the earth. "Son of Man" is a title given to an eschatological figure who had been part of Jewish expectation for several centuries, who would vindicate the righteous and punish evildoers. Matthew joins others in the early Christian movement by applying this language to Jesus.

Isaiah 2:1-5

During the eighth century BCE, a time of considerable social disruption for the peoples of Israel and Judah, Isaiah's oracle described a vision of Mount Zion—a mythic name for Jerusalem—becoming a locus of God's justice and peace for the whole world.

Romans 13:11-14

In about 56 CE Paul wrote to the church in Rome. Believing that the end of the world was at hand, he urged believers to wake up and to live in the light of Christ.

The Readings on This Day

Although the historical record is sketchy, it appears that our Advent arose out of a season of fasting to prepare for baptisms at Epiphany. By the sixth century, an eschatological emphasis was present. Our Advent comprises the four Sundays before Christmas. Each year, the first Sunday highlights the theme of readiness for divine judgment, the second Sunday the ministry of John the Baptist, the third Sunday the Baptist's call to a repentant life, and the fourth Sunday a narrative concerning the birth of Jesus. God comes—in the past in the history of Israel and the incarnation of Jesus, in the present in the word and sacrament of each Sunday, and in the future at the end of all things. The lectionary appoints readings to fit this pattern, and its tone stands in stark contrast to our society's weeks of preparation for Christmas.

Matthew 24:36-44

Advent begins the liturgical year, and in this year A, the gospel readings from Matthew complement the festival gospels taken from John. At this beginning point we contemplate the end: the arrival of the divine judge means the end of the earth as we know it. In Advent we are called to ready our lives to receive our disorienting God. The arrival of God, like a flood, always surprises us.

Isaiah 2:1-5

In Advent the church both anticipates and celebrates the presence of God in Jesus Christ, who is himself, like Jerusalem in the oracle, the locus of divine justice and peace for the world.

Romans 13:11-14

At the start of Advent the church hears Paul's wake-up call to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. God is like the coming dawn.

Images in the Readings

The apocalyptic imagery of **the end of the world**, like the flood sweeping all things away, echoes from the Old Testament into the preaching of Jesus and continues in contemporary disaster movies and terrorist activity. For Christians, fear about the end always comes to rest in trust in the presence of God. When all is over, at our end is God.

Today's readings expand and challenge our society's welcome of God arriving only as baby Jesus, for God comes as **judge** and calls us into a life of justice for all, evoking in us both anticipation and fear. In classical art, Justice often is a towering, robed woman who judges right from wrong.

Often in the Bible God meets with humankind on a **mountain**. In our language a "mountaintop experience" is one so overwhelming that it changes one's future. Sinai, Horeb, Jerusalem, the mount of Jesus' sermon, the Mount of Transfiguration, the Mount of Olives, Golgotha, Zion: all are superimposed on our church buildings, for the Christian mountain is wherever we receive the word and sacraments.

In English the phrase "**swords into plowshares**" indicates the hope for world peace, a hope for which Christians pray to God.

Connections with the Liturgy

The Apostles' Creed anticipates the coming of the judge: I believe in Jesus Christ, who "will come to judge the living and the dead."

From a Scholar

The season of Advent focuses on the entry of Christ into the world: in the past (the incarnation), in the future (the return), and in the present (in word and sacrament). But these entries and their effects are intimately connected and even confused. We may echo Israel's hope for liberation and reconciliation as we cry out for the final approach of God's reign. And we may look for glimmers of the promised final victory of peace, justice, and life in the gifts and effects of proclamation and holy communion. That final victory is the affirmation of this Sunday's first reading and lies behind the imperatives of the second reading and the gospel reading.

Isaiah 2 was written in the eighth century BCE during the rise of Assyria. Judah, where Isaiah lived, was under attack from Israel and Syria but was rescued by Assyria, which destroyed the Northern Kingdom and scattered its population across the empire. In the context of this danger and dispersal, Isaiah foresees a complete reversal: instead of danger there is security, instead of warfare there is peace, and instead of Israelites dispersing among the nations, the nations would come to Jerusalem. And this security, peace, and gathering is not simply for the Israelites but for all people. Isaiah ends with an imperative: if the nations are going to come here to learn about God, we'd better start acting as those who know God!

The gospel reading for Advent 1 is always Jesus' teaching about the last days from the end of the year's gospel. Matthew knows that those days will come as a surprise. Jesus himself denies knowledge of their timing, so that his followers don't relax until the last moment and only then look busy. Not only the timing but the effect of that advent is uncertain. And while the attention paid to the "rapture" by our society makes it seem like the ones "taken" are the lucky ones, this passage makes it clear that "taken" means killed or destroyed. Jesus does not indicate in this sermon what "being ready" entails, but we'll get plenty of chances to hear what that means from John's sermon next week to the Sermon on the Mount next year.

In the closing chapters of Romans, Paul also provides some specifics about what being ready for the last days includes. As usual, he ends his letter with advice, always centering on how the Christian community, in its internal concord and external benevolence, is a foretaste of the "kingdom come."

Mark W. Oldenburg

From a Preacher

The resistance movement in Leipzig, Germany, under East German rule was centered in the Nikolai-kirche, famously Bach's church, in part because their Monday prayers for peace were one of the few places the many groups protesting the government could meet for dialogue and coordination. One symbol for the resistance was *Schwerter zu Pflugscharen*, "swords to plowshares," drawing from our Isaiah reading—an image of a young man working on a weapon. When you look up the image you immediately notice the vigor and strength of his hammer stroke: it is hard work to wrestle the sharp edges into pastoral usage. His movement makes clear that this conversion is not because there's nothing else to do with the implement; rather, it is a powerful preemptive action that upends the usual order of things. Turning weapons into life-giving tools is an act of faith in a different future.

In his essay Mark Oldenburg points to the reversals throughout our readings. Isaiah imagines a day when the movement and might of nations reverses and Jerusalem becomes the center of pilgrimage and wisdom. Paul calls the church out of life as usual to "wake from sleep" and put on Christ. Jesus upends the disciples' and our notions of time and preparation with a shrug: "Not even the Son of Man knows the day." Instead we are to be "ready," for God's future will come in the middle of ordinary life: eating, drinking, marrying, tending fields, grinding meal. Absent a checklist for the end, we are to "stay awake" for something that will arrive suddenly and secretly and subversively.

All of which, of course, puts us out of step with our culture, where capitalism has been eyeing a deadline for maximized sales for weeks, if not months. We are familiar with a readiness deliberately designed to deplete us and our wallets. How is Jesus' coming different? How are we to prepare ourselves for something that could come at any moment, yet that we've been waiting for more than two thousand years, that we know will come in ways we cannot possibly anticipate, right when we aren't looking for it?

Paul's answer is both clear and unhelpfully metaphorical: we are to "put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12) and live honorably. The imperative at the end of the Isaiah reading is similar: "Come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!" (Isa. 2:5). Both presume the light is already at hand, the future already among us, and so preparation is proactively bending our lives (and swords) into the life that is both here and to come: watching for Christ, concerning ourselves for siblings who may be "taken" (and refusing to accept that destruction is inevitable), laying aside all instruments and acts that accord with the world's vision of life around us. It is not dissimilar to the practice field or running drills: we put ourselves into the mindset and movement of what is to come, preparing for the full thing to arrive.

The Leipzig resistance climaxed on October 9, 1989, when prayer services gathered again in the Nikolaikirche. The worshipers fully expected to exit into police cordons and violence; they didn't know that outside, thousands had gathered with candles. The crowd received the worshipers with open arms, and they began to march together around the city, singing and chanting, "*Wir sind das Volk!*" (We are the people). At the Stasi (secret police) headquarters soldiers stood tensely behind barricaded entrances, awaiting violence. All they could do was watch as protesters left candles on the steps and sang. Horst Sindermann, member of the Central Committee of the East German government, is reported to have said, "We had planned for everything. We were prepared for everything. But not for candles and prayers."² How do we make ready for something that will come as a surprise?

Tim Knauff Jr.

Making Connections

- Find ways to highlight the various conjugations of Christ's entry into the world present in liturgy: the past (the incarnation), the present (word and sacrament), and the future (the return). How can your liturgical planning help the assembly experience these as connected, integral moments?
- Consider challenging the assembly to watch for Christ in the week ahead, and gather responses next week. Celebrate together where Jesus showed up in your community and in your lives.
- With children: Your young people are keenly aware that Christmas is coming. Talk with them about how hard it is to wait, about anticipation, and about getting ready. Ask them what they think Jesus means by being "ready" for him.

² Roger J. Newell, *Keine Gewalt! No Violence: How the Church Gave Birth to Germany's Only Peaceful Revolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017).