

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C - First Sunday of Advent
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Luke 21:25-36

Overview of the Church Year

Happy New Year!

Our Church Year begins today with the First Sunday of Advent. Using the Gospel according to Luke as our primary guide, we will journey through the heights and depths of the liturgical year. We begin in Advent by preparing for a coming that has already come and will come again. The explosive joy of Christmas sends us out into the seven weeks of Epiphany to show the world the Good News we are receiving.

Lent calls us back into an interior journey, in which we and our faith community prepare for the incredible gift of Easter – a gift we celebrate for 50 days, culminating in Pentecost, also known as the Birthday of the Church, when once again we notice the Holy Spirit empowering us to do the work we are given to do. The rest of the year (6 months) we will balance digging into stories of Jesus' ministry 2000 years ago with discovering how to be Jesus' ministers in the 21st Century.

This Week...

Advent extends an invitation. The invitation: don't just do something – stand, watch, prepare. *Stand*. Choosing to believe that ours is a safe universe – a universe God chose to enter as an infant. *Watch*. Looking for a coming that has already come and will come again. *Prepare*. Snatching moments from our busyness. Watching for wisps of awe and wonder to show up. Rediscovering that God has chosen to dwell in us and we are invited to dwell in God.

What if – just what if – Jesus is already right here, standing silently with us, walking ahead of us, showing us we don't have to do it all? Could it be that we are called to be still, notice, listen – and then follow?

A notation for this week's Gospel

While the world frantically shops, hoping to find the joy which is announced in the piped-in-music to show up in purchases, we are being called to STOP. No, not to zone out, but to stand and be alert for signs. The Psalm for today calls out: "to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul." And so we hold in tension the delicious preparations of celebrating Christmas with seeking moments of silence in which to be vigilant – to lift up our souls.

Advent Theme: Christ will come again: We watch, we prepare, we get ready.

Advent 1: Choosing to notice.

Before: As you prepare for this session, check with your clergy if there will be changes in the worship service (blue or purple cloths, an Advent Wreath, a different setting of the Eucharist, etc.) and be prepared to invite your class to notice and discuss the changes. You might choose to create a small Advent Wreath and light one candle – particularly if you think the adults might want to see how you do this -- so they could develop an Advent Wreath at home. (See Intergenerational Lesson for more on the Advent Wreath.) You will need Bibles and *Books of Common Prayer*.

Beginning: Invite the class to describe what "feels" different about this new season we begin today: Advent. Work together as a class to come up with your definition of Advent. (Aspects include waiting for Christmas, getting ready, making a space in our lives in which the Christ child could enter.)

Opening Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the glory of the Lord which shall be revealed. Be with us as we stand, watch, and prepare for your coming. Amen.

Option: Make copies of *The Book of Common Prayer* available and ask the group to turn to page 75. Some churches rarely have Morning Prayer on a Sunday, but some individuals or small groups may have it as their Rule of Life to read Morning Prayer daily. You might choose to use the opening sentences of Morning Prayer for each season as you go through this year as a class.

The Scripture: This passage could be approached as having three sections. And so you might choose to read each section separately and discuss it. It would be useful to have three different voices to read: Luke 21: 25-28, 29-33, and 34-36.

Questions for Luke 21: 25-28:

Why do we think "signs" in the sky would be expected by Jesus' hearers? (With no TV or even radio weather forecasters, signs in the sky were their only way of forecasting.)

What other times was a star in the sky a "sign?" (When the shepherds saw it and the Wise Men followed it.)

Using *The Book of Common Prayer*, find places in our worship where we proclaim what Jesus is saying in verse 27 (The Creed, page 363, etc.)

Questions for Luke 21: 29-33:

What is the sign Jesus points out in verses 29-30? (Signs that summer is here.)

What does it mean to this group to speak of the "Kingdom of God"? (What are its aspects? Which are already here? What do we still wait for?)

Some questions for Luke 21: 34-36:

I wonder what things are weighing our hearts down?

What things are causing us to lose our focus?

What "urgent" things are driving out the "important?"

What would "be alert at all times" look like for us?

If we cannot quit our day jobs, how else could we find ways to "be alert?" (Consider ways individuals could grab chunks of time. Discuss ways people could help each other: e-mail messages? Phone calls? Meeting mid-week for coffee? Etc.)

Getting Closure: Provide a few moments of silence for each person to reflect on ways they will choose to find time to be still and be with God. Invite those who choose to do so to share what they have come up with.

Closing Prayer: Read the Collect for the First Sunday of Advent, BCP p. 211.

Luke 21:25-36

The Coming of the Son of Man

'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'

Exhortation to Watch

'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'