

**Lesson Plans that Work**  
**Year A – First Sunday of Advent**  
**Lesson Plans for Younger Children**

**Scripture: Matthew 24:36-44**

Happy New Church Year! The Gospel according to Matthew will be our main guidebook through Year A. Matthew appears to have had a hunch that the Son of Man's expected return just might be taking a bit longer than expected. Matthew helps us figure out how to live — as we celebrate the birth and life of Jesus and await his coming again. One thing Matthew is very clear about: be ready!

The school year began months ago; New Year's Day is over a month away. Yet here we are, beginning our new Church year with the First Sunday of Advent. Advent invites us to risk pushing on through the world's weariness to expectant hope. Something's coming we proclaim! Immanuel: God With Us in the form of an infant. We celebrate what happened 2000 years ago while we look to the promise that Jesus will come again. We are also called, as we live in this parenthesis time, to look for messages God continues to send: what has happened, and will happen again, is also happening now: right here.

**A Notation for This Week's Gospel**

Keep awake, for you do not know when Jesus is coming back. This message is not intended to cause us to cower in fear. Fear provides a useful warning signal, but it can also have the potential to paralyze us. Instead, we are called to the opposite of fear; we are called to faith.

**Theme: Be Ready for Messages**

**Before:** Decide what you will do to make your classroom look a bit different for Advent. An Advent wreath is a possibility. Consider this safe construction option: bring greens, a pan to arrange them on, four drinking glasses filled about  $\frac{3}{4}$  full of baking soda, a votive candle nestled in each baking soda-filled glass, and wooden matches. Fireplace matches are best so that the children can assist lighting the candles each week. We suggest blowing them out when you have finished your prayers and story. If lighting candles is not a possibility, you could use electric candles in your wreath. Another alternative would be to take a large piece of paper and draw a simple wreath with four tall candles. Each week the children can color an additional candle and top it with a bright yellow flame until you have all four candles colored. Most churches are using blue candles for Advent, with the third candle pink for Mary.

The theme for Advent is messages. Today the children are invited to make little cards to slip into the pockets of people who do extra work this season: harried grocery store check-out clerks, stocking clerks in toy stores, mail carriers, UPS delivery people, police, etc. Bring small plastic sandwich bags (the zip-type works best) and pieces of colored paper, cut to fit in the bags. You may want to print "Thank You" on each of the pieces of paper before you cut them up. You will also need crayons and whatever other art supplies you have on hand (glitter, stickers, stars, whatever) to decorate the cards.

**Beginning:** If you have brought the makings of an Advent Wreath, invite the children to help you get it arranged and light one candle. If you are offering the wreath drawing, explain it to the children and invite their help coloring one of the candles. When completed have the children stand around the wreath as you offer your prayer.

**Opening Prayer:** Thank you, God, for Advent, the time we wait for the birth of the baby Jesus. Thank you that Jesus was born and came to live with us. Thank you that Jesus is here with us today, even if we cannot see him. Amen.

**The Story:** What might happen if we took all our favorite toys out to a park, left them lying around there and then just went home without them? Do you think they would all be there when we came back? What if it rained, or snowed, or a fierce wind started to blow? What might happen to these toys we really like? What do we do to take care of toys we really like?

In our story today, Jesus is telling people to pay attention and take care of important things. Jesus says that if you do not take care of things, someone might take them away from you. Then Jesus tells the people that he will be back some day, and not one of us knows when that will be. Jesus says he will come back some time when no one is expecting him. And Jesus wants you to have taken care of and not forgotten the important things.

**Activity:** Ask the children if any of them have seen any different lights in people's houses and in the places where we go shopping? Did anything look different in our church today? (An Advent Wreath? Different colors on the altar?) What do they think is going to happen? Who is coming? (Accept all responses, including Santa Clause and lots of presents.) Ask them what their favorite thing about Christmas is.

Then tell the children that Advent can be a hard time for some people. People who work in stores may have to work even harder. People who deliver mail and packages have lots of extra work. Show the children the supplies you have brought and the plastic bags. Tell them that we are going to make a batch of cards to give to these people who do so much extra work. Invite the children to draw pictures of hearts or whatever they want as "messages." Suggest the children take their bags of messages with them when they go to grocery stores, toy stores, etc. so they can give their messages to clerks working in the stores, to delivery people coming to their house, and to whoever else they notice. After the cards are made put the cards in the plastic bags. When they have finished, help the children get all their cards into their plastic bags and close the bags.

**Getting Closure:** Ask the children to sit in a circle, holding their plastic bags. Help them consider who they can give the cards to this week. If you have time, they can share one of the cards that they made to the group.

**Closing Prayer:** Thank you, God, for all the people in our lives who work hard. Thank you that we can be messengers, too. Amen.

*Printed by the Office for Formation and Vocation Ministries of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.*

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