

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections  
based on this week's lectionary readings

November 30, 2014  
Advent 1B

## The readings this week:

- Isaiah 64:1-9 ◦ Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
- 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 ◦ Mark 13:24-37

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## One Candle

This Sunday is the first in Advent, and many churches will light the first candle in the Advent wreath, with readings about hope and peace. As an additional candle is lit on each of the successive three Sundays, the figurative light in the darkness grows.

One candle won't make much of a difference in a well-lit room. Even if the room were darkened, a single flame, though more visible, wouldn't do much good.

The candle serves, though, as a strong symbol of watching and waiting in expectation and hope through the dark times.

Advent is about waiting. We talk to our children about waiting to open gifts. There are heavier kinds of waiting. I don't know about you, but I'm honestly pretty tired of waiting—waiting for war to be over so we don't have to send any more people into harm's way; waiting for the end to terrorism so no one has to be afraid to get on an airplane; waiting for an end to abuse so that children and adults don't have to be afraid in their own homes; waiting for the hungry to be fed and the jobless to find work; waiting for people to sit at the negotiating table to end violence in all the hot spots around the world; waiting for our own leaders to come to some helpful compromise.



Jesus said, "What I say to you I say to all: Keep awake." [Mark 13]

We are still waiting, yes, but it is an active waiting. We have to stay awake, be alert and on the lookout for the movement of God.

And so together we light one candle, we stay awake, and we watch. We are watching for any signs of God, we are listening for the stirrings of the Spirit, we are participating in the life of justice. We are ready to catch the flame of this one candle and gently carry it wherever we go, taking hope with us to share.

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

### Watching for Christ

They watch for Christ  
who are sensitive, eager, apprehensive in mind,  
who are awake, alive, quick-sighted,  
zealous in honoring him,  
who look for him in all that happens, and  
who would not be surprised,  
who would not be over-agitated or overwhelmed,  
it they found that he was coming at once....

This then is to watch:  
to be detached from what is present, and  
to live in what is unseen;  
to live in the thought of Christ as he came  
once,  
and as he will come again;  
to desire his second coming, from our  
affectionate  
and grateful remembrance of his first.

John Henry Newman 1801-1890  
Parochial and Plain Sermons, vol. 4, quoted from  
An Advent Sourcebook, Liturgy Training Publications

# Reflecting on the Word



## \_\_\_ 1st Reading: [Isaiah 64:1-9](#)

Isaiah 64 gives us an idea of what will happen when God comes. Isaiah cries out to God this prayer: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!" What would happen if we prayed this prayer and God answered? Where has God caught you by surprise? Have we boxed God up so that he "cannot" surprise us anymore? What do we expect from God? What if he did something we did not expect? What do you "long" for God to do? Are you trying to "make it happen" for God so he won't have to do it? Leo Percer, [Beyond the Wardrobe](#)

## \_\_\_ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19](#)

If you were to formulate a personal prayer of revival for your own life or for your congregation, how would you word it? What elements should be present in a prayer for personal or congregational revival? What does this prayer in Psalm 80 have in common with 2 Chronicles 7:14? How does this kind of prayer pave the way for revival and restoration to take place? What do revival and restoration have in common with Advent? [Experiencing the Psalms](#)

"LORD, you are our father. We are the clay, and you are our potter. All of us are the work of your hand." Like lumps of clay, we ask God to make us into the people God wants us to be. We are the works of God's hands seeking justice and mercy for the least and the lost among us. God is not done creating.

We all know where Advent leads us. A baby being born in a dirty manger doesn't seem like the God who breaks through the heavens to come down. Or does it? As we journey through Advent, let's allow ourselves to be surprised by the God who continues to do awesome deeds that we did not expect.



Wait.

Anticipate.

Hope.

For it is indeed worth the wait.

[not all those who wander are lost](#)

## Praying Toward Sunday

Restore us, O Lord, we pray,  
bring us back to that place  
where we once met,  
as shepherds to the stable  
after hearing angels sing.  
Bring us back to that place  
when our love was fresh,  
not embarrassed  
to express itself in praise  
to our heavenly King.  
Restore us, O Lord, we pray.

[Faith and Worship](#)



## \_\_\_ 3rd Reading: [1 Corinthians 1:3-9](#)

Think of a time when someone who really cared for you confronted you with a failure to live up to your values. What qualities of that encounter made it constructive? Praise God for giving you people who care about your spiritual life. Even though the Corinthians had the Spirit, why couldn't they be considered spiritual? What two illustrations does Paul use to describe himself and Apollos? In what ways is God's church like a field being planted? How does this chapter affect your view of your own ministry in the church? [Quiet Time Bible Study](#), [InterVarsity Press](#)

## \_\_\_ 4th Reading: [Mark 13:24-37](#)

What puzzles you in this text? Where are you drawn and why? Advent is a season of waiting for the birth of Christ. We are invited to be in a spirit of 'mindful waiting' or watchfulness. In what ways are you going to have a spirit of 'mindful waiting' this season? For what are you waiting? Longing for this season for you, those you love and this world in which we find ourselves? [Preach with Me](#)