

Sermon Notes – November 30, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 24: 36-44
Peace Lutheran Church
“A Wake-Up Call”

This section of Matthew's gospel is often referred to as a “little apocalypse” because of its use of symbolic language in describing the Day of the Lord. While the genre of apocalypse has taken on a second life in contemporary culture, characterized by movies and literature that features zombies, nuclear annihilation, and alien invasion, its meaning was different in the first century world. The apocalyptic genre simply referred to a style of writing that used rich symbolism to reveal the truth about the world, usually in dualistic terms. The greek verb *apokalypso* means “to reveal” or “uncover”; hence, the title of the last book of the New Testament, *Apokalypsis Ioannou*, which is translated “The Revelation of John.” It is significant to note, therefore, that the purpose of Matthew's apocalypse isn't to instill fear. Jesus isn't predicting people literally disappearing from their fields – or rather, maybe, or maybe not. Nor is the reality of God's return necessarily as dualistic as this section of Matthew makes it sound. These are all features of the genre Matthew's Jesus is using to attempt to uncover heavenly reality that, this side of the resurrection, one can never fully know or understand. Which is, of course, how Jesus begins the entire discourse: “But about that day and hour no one knows” (Matt. 24: 36). Make no mistake, Jesus will come again and the many things described in Revelation will occur. It is just that we cannot know or understand what it will all look like.

The whole discourse results from Jesus, as a teacher, answering his disciples' question: “Tell us,” they said, “when will this be, and what will be the sign of Your coming at the end of the age?” (Matt. 24: 3). But Jesus doesn't give them the countdown calendar for which they were hoping. Instead, Jesus - and later Paul - exhorts the faithful, “Keep awake!” (Matt. 24: 42; Rom.13: 11). Like parents on a road trip telling their child, “We're getting closer,” Paul writes in what may have been his final letter, “Salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers” (Rom. 13: 11). But the truth remains, “About that day and hour no one knows” (Matt. 24: 36).

In this season of Advent (literally, “arrival” or emergence”), the faithful are called to be alert to all the ways in which God is *already* present in the history of Israel (Ps.122:5, Isa.2: 3), in the incarnation of Christ (whose speech is at the center of Matthew's entire revelation), and in the light of Christ's body shared and proclaimed in the midst of the faithful from every generation (Rom 13: 12-14). The revelation of Christ is not a moment for which Christians are to count down in anticipation; it is one toward which we are to move with sure confidence. Because of God's sure faithfulness we can *already* go up to the house of the Lord (Ps. 122:1), learn God's ways and walk in His path (Isa. 2:3), beat our swords into plowshares (Isa.2: 4), and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13: 12).