

St James' Church, Weybridge

Advent Sunday, 30th November 2025

Introduction and Call to Worship

Let us come before the Lord our God, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths until we are ready to meet him face to face.

Today's Readings

First Reading Romans 13:11-14

Paul writes to the church in Rome of expectation and hope, as the light of salvation in Christ shines ever brighter in the lives of believers.

Gospel Matthew 24:36-44

Jesus urges his followers to be on the alert, looking for the signs of the fulfilment of God's purposes for the world.

HOMILY *"Keep awake!"* (Matthew 24:42)

Wake O wake with tidings thrilling! Or, in the words of today's Gospel, Keep awake! The author of the Advent carol we will sing at the end of our 10am Eucharist, led an eventful life! Philipp Nicolai born in 1556, was a notable German priest who fled the Spanish army, sparred with Roman Catholic and Calvinist opponents alike, and ministered to plague-stricken congregations – during a period of church reformation, his journey led him to become a Lutheran. He was someone who lived out his faith, and he very much kept awake – but he was always on the watch for those who were after him and in the end, they did catch up with him!

There is the physical need to be watchful and awake, and then a spiritual need. Both Jesus and Paul talk about being awake to God's activity in the world, in a spiritual as well as physical sense, a tradition which is rooted in the earliest Biblical texts. Ancient Israel believed that the world had purpose and order and they speak of purpose. There is order in the natural world, even when human beings are more chaotic. The world's seasons come and go, and we look for the signs all around us of change.

Today in the face of Climate change, one summer is not exactly the same as the previous and that has certainly been the case this year. Indeed it has almost felt like summer and winter have extended to meet – one day it was 15oC and the next -2. It has been a very mild, strange autumn. Tomorrow brings winter, but with a cold snap we have already felt its presence. Yes there is order and structure, but also we live in a time of immense challenge and change. Today, as in biblical times, there is human failure and despair, but there is also tremendous hope and expectation, which includes

being ready for the appearance of God in our midst, like a bridegroom in anticipation of a great covenantal celebration!

Jesus' teaching and ministry challenges us to always keep awake and watchful, for the fulfilment of God's creative purposes, the one who is about something new. For God is active – yes, something is happening before our very eyes. A Christmas festival per chance? Believers, be alert, looking for the signs, ready for anything – This is Advent Sunday, a new Church year – Readings from Year A and Matthew's Gospel! St Paul encourages Christians to wake up to what God has done, the old relationship or covenant, and what God is about in Christ – the new relationship, and to live as those who may meet the risen Christ face to face at any moment – be ready! For St Paul, writing to the Romans, there is a sense of expectation.

People in relationship with God always believed that we live in a purposeful, God inspired world. Our Lord, and St Paul therefore urge us to be on the alert for the signs of God's activity, especially in times of great challenge, for the creator may just be about something new, but do we perceive it? Now, I don't know about you, but in contrast to this message, I do quite like order and structure. A bit of predictability is wonderful. But the world around us is not always so obliging! Our biblical texts today suggest we that we are waiting in anticipation for something that is both exciting and yet also terrifying.

And there is hope still to be found in times of uncertainty, for God is with us. Emmanuel is with us. Indeed, as a church and community and individuals, we must work together to make life and this world better. Or to put it another way, not knowing encourages us to dream, and work together while we are waiting and watching. As an inclusive church community that means living with different opinions and including everyone in the journey. This season of Advent is all about that disturbing hope, anticipation and willingness to face change together, as we re-discover our sense of expectation and think about the resources we need as we prepare to meet Christ face to face.

So, wake O wake with tidings thrilling! Yes, stay awake, and watchful, just as Philipp Nicolai did – hopefully not because we are on the run from marauding Spanish Catholics, but looking forward to the fulfilment of God's promises, which are revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord, and revealed in God's time. Amen.

Father Damian Harrison-Miles, November 2025.