**1 Advent, Dec. 1, 2013, Isaiah 2:1-5, Ps122, Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24: 36-44 , Rev Mary Trainor**

This morning is a special morning for many reasons: it is the first of December and it is the last day of gun deer hunting season – these are both big! But, today is an especially special day because it is the first day of Advent, the first day of the Church calendar. Advent means "**coming**" in Latin; it is the leading up to Jesus' arrival as a baby and Jesus' second coming. We began our service with the lighting of the first candle in our Advent wreath, reminding us of this four weeks of preparation. It is a penitential season, when we prepare our hearts, minds, and lives to receive Jesus. In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us the serious message that we need to “***be ready***” for this event, for we don’t know when He is coming again. He said, "***About that day and hour, no one knows***."

Two months ago in Colorado there was a torrential downpour: a foot of rain in 24 hours. Flood waters drained down the mountains, washing away houses, roads, cars, and huge trees in a 200 square mile area. I just returned from there, and the magnitude of the devastation is difficult to describe -- massive, tragic, dramatic. But, did you know that only a few people lost their lives in the flood -- countless lives were saved because of the government's EWS: "Early Warning System" which enabled most people to be evacuated away from danger beforehand. They had time to prepare. An Early Warning System is "*a chain of information communication systems comprising sensor, detection, and decision subsystems working in conjunction to give sufficient time for preparing resources and response systems to minimize the impact on the stability of the physical world."* (Waidyanatha, 2010). Another, much more massive flood, was the Genesis flood (6-9), when Noah saved the animals two by two in the Ark. The people were not ready for this flood, and they were swept away. Jesus tells us His coming again is going to be sudden, like that flood. In today's Gospel He is giving us the "early warning system" to minimize the negative impact on our lives, and maximize the positive impact. He tells us to "***be ready.***" This sounds reasonable, but **how** do we do this? How do we get ready for the coming of Jesus? Fortunately, our Scripture readings today that tell us how to prepare, how to respond to Jesus' "early warning system." We need to do three things: 1. Wake up, 2. Put on the Lord Jesus, and 3. Walk in the light. Let's look at each of these three ways to prepare, one at a time.

First, we need to wake up: Jesus advises us to, ***“keep awake….be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”*** We think we are awake to what we need to be alert about, but often we are not. We do not heed the early warning system. Example: In Pennsylvania in 1979, there was an incident at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant. The operators saw a bunch of lights going off, but they didn't respond as they should have. They were used to their daily routine, but not this. Like them, the people in the time of Noah weren't prepared for the flood as they just kept on their usual routine. We can be like this in our daily lives too: God is blinking lights at us to get our attention, but we are not paying much attention as we are focused on our usual routine. It is easy to live oblivious of all that God gives us. Advent is like an alarm clock for us, a "wake-up call" to become alert to our blessings from Jesus. You can chose to ignore the alarm, you can hit snooze, or you can answer the "wake up call" and live alert to God every day, awake! It is your choice.

Paul brought up our second way to be ready for Christ’s coming: “***put on the Lord Jesus Christ***.”One way to do this is to bring spiritual awareness as we put on our clothes each morning. Use the letter "S" as an easy way to remember to do this: as you put on your **Shirt**, be enveloped by His reconciling grace; as you put on your **Sweater** or Sweatshirt, Jesus is protecting you with His grace; as you pull on your **Socks**, you are warmed by His love, as you slip on your **Shoes**, you walk in His light, and as you put on your **Scarf** realize you are wrapped in forgiveness. Bring an awareness to yourself of Jesus' love each time you put on an item. Clothed in the Lord, you are doing THE important work of preparing yourself for Christ.

Third, walk in the light. The prophet Isaiah said in our OT reading this morning, ***“come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!”*** What is this kind of light? In this time of year in the north, when our days are so short and there is so much darkness, we wake in the dark, we eat in the dark, the days seem bleak. Taking an actual walk in the light is difficult– because there aren’t many hours of light. When we are out in the sun, we get a dose of Vitamin D; medical research has shown that we need Vitamin D to remain healthy. Some people are affected by the syndrome called SAD, Seasonal Affective Disorder, which causes them to get really down when we have one grey day after another. I have a family member affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder, and she uses what is called “light therapy” to reduce her symptoms. “Light therapy” consists of sitting in a certain wavelength of light from a special lamp for a period of time every day. Our OT and Epistle readings talk about a different kind of light therapy: God’s light. God’s light can shine brightly anywhere, anytime night or day, even in our northern winters. It does not require lamps, shopping, or vitamins. St. Paul said: ***“lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.***” We live in God's light by connecting to God, by valuing Jesus and what He did for us above everything else. If we live our lives every minute with awareness of and gratitude to God and His love for us, we will ***walk in the light.*** My friend Lorna shined so brightly with God's light. Lorna had a very difficult life. She was widowed, had medical problems, kids in trouble, and so on. Lorna was not a sugar coated Christian, pretending things were OK when they weren't. She was real: honest about her difficulties. But, she prayed so much that all those problems paled in comparison to God's role in her life -- her prayer life strengthened her not only to deal with her problems, but to be a shining light to others. She "***lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.***" You can too.

In the next four weeks, as you see people stress out about getting the right gifts, about budgets for gifts, about holiday parties, about family gatherings -- smile to yourself about the REAL preparation for Christmas: wake up, put on the Lord, and walk in the Light. Jesus gave us His Early Warning System. This is preparing for Christmas Christ’s way – it costs nothing and gives us energy and abundant life, and takes away stress. Jesus is coming with His perfect love for you. Will you “***be ready”***? Amen.