

# 01B - ADVENT 1B - BIBLE STUDY

Waiting in the dark

## Abstract

“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

Mark 13:35–37

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## 01B - Advent 1B - Bible Study

Waiting in the dark

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2020 | ADVENT 1B | FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT | YEAR B

<i>Old Testament</i>	Isaiah 64:1–9
<i>Psalms</i>	Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19
<i>New Testament</i>	1 Corinthians 1:3–9
<i>Gospel</i>	Mark 13:24–37 <sup>i</sup>

### Mark 13.24-37

Jesus speaks of coming dark days when people will be close to losing hope. He urges them therefore to stay awake to signs that offer hope of the coming deliverance, which will certainly come, though at an unexpected time.

**This week's resources explore:** watching for signs of God in difficult times.

## Welcome and opening prayer

Gathered here today,  
     we wait in hope,  
 knowing that in dark times  
     there is always a light in our world.  
 Let us, people in dusk and dawn,  
     light the light of vigilance,  
     knowing that God is always calling us  
     to justice, mercy and humility –  
     at this time of year,  
 and all times of the year.  
 Amen.

## Read the text

*Mark 13:24–37*

<sup>24</sup> “But in those days, following that distress,

“ ‘the sun will be darkened,  
 and the moon will not give its light;

<sup>25</sup> the stars will fall from the sky,  
 and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

<sup>26</sup> “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

<sup>28</sup> “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

<sup>32</sup> “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. <sup>34</sup> It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

<sup>35</sup> “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back— whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ” ii

*respond*

For the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

## Exegesis

Mark 13.24-37

Scholars speculate that the background to Mark’s Gospel was the Judean revolt against Roman rule (AD 66–70). Rome responded with fury and destroyed the region. Thus, we get apocalyptic imagery that is reminiscent of Isaiah 34.4. For many people living in Judea at that time, the sky literally fell in (vv.24-25). It is unimaginably difficult to maintain hope for the future in such circumstances. Knowing that Caesar was also known as both Son of God and Son of Man means that the darkness is deepened in a dramatic way. Who is it that is coming in the clouds? Is it our Saviour? Or our Destroyer? In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus uses this kind of imagery several times (8.38–9.1; 14.62).

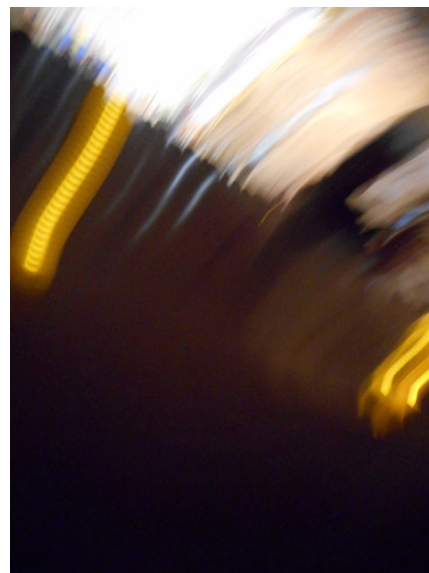
It seems strange to be reading such a dark text at the beginning of Advent, and yet even at the darkest time of the year there is hope to be discerned – if we are attentive. Jesus turns to the symbol of the fig tree again, perhaps the same tree he had earlier cursed (see Mark 11.12-14, <sup>[19]</sup>20-21) and which had withered. He holds out the possibility of it putting out shoots that would signal the end of the darkness of winter and the coming of summer. However, if one is not paying attention, these signs are easy to miss. Therefore, be alert and stay awake (13.33,34b,35,37).

For people in the midst of a war, the tender shoots of a fig tree and the promise of summer may offer little comfort. Jesus seems to emphasise this by saying the shoots are not the rescue, only the promise of rescue. It is near, it is at the very gates, but it has not passed through those gates yet (v.29). But if one can be sure of the imminence of release, perhaps one can hold on for just a minute more. This is the importance of the signs; they enable us to hold on, even when things are really difficult and we feel we are about to be overrun.

## Picture pointers: ‘How would you describe this image?’

Reflection questions on this week's picture

- How would you describe this image?
- What moments of ‘light in the darkness’ have you experienced?
- When times are dark, what keeps you watching and waiting?



## Live your faith

Have an Advent candle in your home this Advent since we can’t have one at church. You are encouraged to light the candle at meal times or if, at any time, the darkness gets too much for them. Then, before blowing it out, offer a simple prayer (rather than making a wish) e.g.

God of light and night,  
you are to be found, whether at dusk or dawn.  
Sometimes the light seems far,  
and the night seems long.  
May I find comfort, <sup>[1]</sup>whether in the soft night, or the kind dawn,  
knowing that you created both,  
and you wait for me, as I wait for you.  
Amen.

## We are sent out

We have been called in,  
to be renewed in the name of the one who is love.  
Even in the darkest night,  
even when there is only one small candle lit,  
your power and love restore us.  
Let your light shine on us as we go from here,  
so that we may be warmed and strengthened  
to light your light all around.  
Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> [Revised Common Lectionary](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

<sup>ii</sup> [Revised Common Lectionary](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.