

Watch and Pray!

Revelation 4:1-11, 6:6-14 Mark 13 *selected verses*

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When you think about the **Last Day**, and seeing Jesus in the sky with all the Holy Angels, how do you picture it. Do you picture it like a bird in the sky that will gradually just get larger and larger as He gets closer? Or perhaps you picture a dramatic rolling of clouds that give way to a vision of Jesus in the sky? St. Paul teaches us that we will hear the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God bursting forth into the world. Maybe ... the entire sky and atmosphere disappear from horizon to horizon and the entire sky becomes a grand and majestic view of heaven, similar what we heard in Revelation 4 and 5 today. However it happens, it's going to be a magnificent and splendid and beautiful day of glory for Christ and His People.

As far as Church History is concerned, all the major events have happened --- except the Return of Christ¹. The Creation of the world, the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, the Incarnation of the Son of God in Bethlehem, the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost --- all of these things have occurred and have lasting power, significance, and effect in the life of the Holy Christian Church. We are currently in the “End Times,” also called the “Last Days”; it's a time when the Holy Christian Church goes into all nations, *making disciples* by baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that Christ has commanded. It is also a time when we sit on the edge of our seats waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ great glory and power and with all the Holy Angels.

Jesus said, “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. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘**Watch!**’” Mark 13:35-36

¹ The New Testament word “*Parousia*” means “return of the King”. It is used 24 times in the NT; 17 of those in reference to the Return of Christ on the Last Day. Other words that the New Testament uses for Christ’s return are “epiphany” which means His “appearing”; and “apocalypse” which means His “revealing”. (“Apocalypse” is also the Name of the Book of “Revelation”, as God “reveals” truths about the End Times to us.)

When Jesus talks about the **Last Day**, and His return in glory and power, **there is always an urgency to it.**

Watch and Pray, He says;

Look, I am coming soon! He declares; *You do not know the day or the hour*, He teaches; *Do not be found sleeping*, He warns. There is an **urgency** whenever Jesus teaches about His return on the Last Day.

The danger of course is *apathy*; that your heart will *grow cold* towards the Lord, that you will get *caught up and tangled* in the ways of the world, that sin will become a lifestyle for you, and that repentance will no longer occur in your life. The danger is that you will *fall away from the faith*, that you will *forget* the grace of God and His eternal salvation, that your sinful nature will lead you into unrepentant rebellion, disobedience, and immorality.

When Jesus teaches us to *Watch and Pray*, He is calling you to **repentance**.

Repentance is turning away from your sin, confessing it to God, and knowing that you are forgiven because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance is an attitude and a lifestyle that we live in: we are always renouncing sin, always sorrowful for it, always knowing that we are forgiven because of the life and death of the Lord Jesus. A life of repentance keeps sin from growing and entangling you and taking over your life. A life of repentance keeps you focused on your Savior and His will for your life. A life of repentance is a life of humility, letting the Law of God work in your heart and in your conscience to expose your sin, and then knowing and believing that you are loved and forgiven because of the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus teaches you to *Watch and Pray*, He is calling you to repentance

Watch and Pray is also a call to be **alert**.

You have been given knowledge of the Kingdom of God, including the truth that Jesus will return visibly on the Last Day. And so you stay alert, knowing that Jesus could return at any moment.

- ➡ You stay alert in the faith when the Lord is front and center in your life.

You, Christ, sit in splendid glory,
enthroned at God's right hand,
Upholding earth and heaven
by forces You command.
We know that You will come
as our Judge that final day,
So help Your servants
You have redeemed by blood, we pray;
May we with saints be numbered
where praises never end,
In glory everlasting,
Amen, O Lord, Amen!

We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God
This is a hymn is a version of the great "Te Deum Laudamus"

- ➡ You stay alert in the faith when you fear, love, and trust in God above all things.
- ➡ You stay alert in the faith when you realize that everything you are and everything you have is a gift from God's good hand.
- ➡ You stay alert in the faith when you are striving to be more and more biblically literate and doctrinally sound through the study of God's Holy Word.

Being alert in the faith is the opposite of apathy, and apostasy. You stay alert because you know that Jesus might return at any moment; you stay alert, because the 'Signs of the End' are everywhere all the time².

We are coming up on one way in which the Holy Christian Church has historically *watched and prayed* over the centuries. **It's by observing the seasons of the Church Year.** The Church Year is a yearly calendar where we remember Christ and His work of salvation for us. The Church Year³ keeps the person and work of Jesus Christ in front of us year after year after year as we *Watch and Pray*; as we *Abide* in Christ until He returns on the Last Day in great glory and power. You are probably familiar with some of the Church Year:

- ➡ The Church Year begins with **Advent**, and remembering that God is faithful and He kept His Promises throughout the Old Testament to send a Savior, the Messiah, the Christ who would rescue us from our sins. Advent is a Latin word that means *arrival*; It's a time to prepare for the arrival of the Christ, born in Bethlehem⁴.

² Jesus Himself teaches us about the "Signs of the End", as does the New Testament in many places. The Signs of the End that confirm that Jesus' return is imminent include wars and rumors of war, earthquakes, famine, a plethora of false teachers, and the persecution of God's People. The greatest sign is the preaching of the Gospel to all nations. Most of these signs are in the news every day; the intensity of these signs call us to repentance and alertness. **Jesus' return is eminent!** [If you want to study more about the 'Signs of the End', go to Trinity's website www.trinitylcs.org, click the "info center" tab across the top, go to the "study notes for Revelation", and open or download the file called "6 2017 Notes.pdf"]

³ The Church Year has been very carefully worked out, and is extremely detailed, even down to themes, significance and meaning for each day of the year. In this sermon, we are only scratching the surface by highlighting the main seasons. If you would like to study the church year in more detail, I would encourage you to go to this link: <https://www.lcms.org/worship/church-year/sundays-and-seasons> to get started.

⁴ The season of Advent begins next Sunday, December 3, 2023. The Church Year is not associated with the calendar year; it stands apart as a way of marking time and abiding with Christ until He returns on the Last Day. The Holy Christian Church has used the Church Year to "watch and pray" for centuries and centuries. Advent is the beginning of the Church Year, it's like "New Year's Day" if you will, for the Holy Christian Church. [It is unfortunate that so many Churches have abandoned the Church Year and its depth of significance and meaning. Many Christians – including their pastors – have no idea about it.]

- ➡ **Christmas** is a two week season in the Church Year in which we remember and celebrate the good tidings of great joy, that unto us was born in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Christmas is one of the most important days in the history of the world, as God the Creator *became flesh* in order to save us from our sins.
- ➡ **Epiphany** follows the Christmas season, and we hear stories from the New Testament that teach us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who will do the work of salvation through His life, death, and resurrection.
- ➡ **Lent** is a long penitential season in which we remember the seriousness of our sin that caused God the Father to send His only begotten Son for us and our salvation. Lent is a 40 day journey that begins with the solemn day of Ash Wednesday; and it takes us into Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday.
- ➡ **Easter** is the greatest day in the Holy Christian Church and in the history of the world: Jesus rose from the dead on the Third Day! He is the Savior of the world who brings life and salvation to all people! We *watch and pray* during the Easter season as we study, learn, and cherish the post-resurrection appearances of Christ and what it means that He has risen from the dead!
- ➡ **Pentecost** the Pentecost season reminds us of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Holy Christian Church.
- ➡ The Pentecost season runs into the long **Trinitarian** season where we learn about the Christian faith and life as we continually grow and mature as God's people.

The Church Year is one way that we *watch and pray*; for the return of Christ. The Church Year keeps Christ and the gospel in front of us; year after year we are *Abiding* in Christ, and as we do, we are sitting on the edge of our seats, waiting and watching for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Last Day in great power and glory.

The Last Day is coming soon; and it's going to be grand, majestic, and glorious! No matter how you picture it in your mind, multiply that by a 1,000 and I doubt you're even close to what it's going to be like. Until we find out, and we see it with our own eyes, we are sitting on the edge of our seats waiting for it, or as Jesus puts it, we *watch and pray*!

Amen!

Lord Jesus,

we believe you are our Lord and King, the Savior of the world!

We trust your Word and the promise of your sudden and imminent return.

Help us to watch and pray so that we are ready when You return.

Help us to live in repentance, and to stay alert in the faith.

Help us to live holy lives so that our words and deeds may be lights that shine in this world, so that others may see our faith and trust in You while there is still time.

We pray this in Jesus' Name, our soon returning Lord, King, and Savior, Amen!

Revelation 4:1-11

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. 6 Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’ who was, and is, and is to come.” 9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

Revelation 6:6-14

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. 9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." 11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" 13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" 14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Mark 13 *selected verses*

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

5 Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

9 “You must be on your guard. ...

12 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ...

20 “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. 21 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. 22 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time. ...

26 “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 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. 28 “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. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. 32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Watch and pray! You do not know when that time will come. 34 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. 35 “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. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”