



Jesus said to his disciples: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."

Introductory Prayer: Heavenly Father, I gladly spend a few minutes with you, to be close to you, because you know how much I need your presence and grace in my life. You deserve to be the center of my thoughts and desires; but often I let myself be taken up by the anxieties of daily life. Sorry Lord, but at least here I am right now, hungry for you alone. Today, Lord, I accompany the whole Church as we begin the Advent Season and begin to prepare for your coming to earth as a baby on Christmas morning.

Petition: Lord, prepare my heart for your coming at Christmas.

1. The World Then and Now: When Christ came to earth 2,000 years ago he encountered a world similar to the one we live in: far from God and full of anxiety. The lives of many people of Christ's time were devoid of meaning because God had not yet sent his Son into the world. Today, as then, our world often lives as if Christ had never come to earth. But hope is not lost. Christ is our hope! Is my life full of meaning rooted in Christ's saving message, or do I permit worries and selfish desires to choke my spirit?

2. Christ Is Coming: Advent and Christmas are all about Christ coming to earth to give us hope. On that cold, quiet, star-filled winter's night in a little, poor cave in Bethlehem, God was born into our world. The Almighty came into the world as a small, poor, innocent baby adored only by his mother and father and some animals. Yes, this child is the reason for our hope, infinite hope, because he is an infinite God making an infinite act of love for us. To permit my soul to be filled with this quiet, gentle hope, what noise within my heart first needs to be shut off?

3. A Heart Checkup: Surprises can be pleasant, like an unexpected birthday party or a successful close on a big business deal. But they can also be unpleasant, like the pop quiz given at school or a sudden car accident. Will Christmas take me by surprise this year? The good news is that I know that he is coming: less than a month away. Christ tells us, "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy and thus allow that day to catch you by surprise." Advent is a time to wake up to Christ in our life. We need to prepare our hearts for his coming on Christmas morning so that he can be received by us with warmth and joy. Christ is the reason for the season!

Conversation with Christ: Lord, help me during this Advent Season, which begins today, to see that the priority in my life is preparing myself and those around me for a truly "spiritual" Christmas. I know it is a busy time of year. Help me remain focused on what is essential -- you being born into our hearts.

Resolution: I will begin some form of daily Advent reminder for myself and those I live with so we can prepare our hearts for Christmas: Advent wreath, Advent calendar, Jesse Tree etc.