It was just after dawn when I stepped outside into the November air. A grey light lay over the houses like a thin film. The street seemed caught between seasons, unsure of which one to claim, with the last scraps of autumn scattered across the pavement as if dropped in passing while chasing the following season.

In the quiet, it felt as though the world was thinking its own thoughts. Advent often begins this way, not with noise but with a stillness that seems to hold more knowledge than it chooses to reveal.

Into that hush, Jesus says, “Keep awake.” It is not a command shouted through a megaphone. It is spoken in the tone of someone trying to wake you gently, someone who knows you have been asleep longer than you meant to be.

He is not talking about eyelids or circadian rhythms. He is talking about the more perilous sleep, the dulling of the inner senses, the ability we have to move through our days as though they belong to someone else. The sleep that makes us ignore what is unfolding right beside us. The sleep that tells us everything is fine when something inside us knows it is not.

People today argue about the word “woke,” as if it were a weapon or a password. But once upon a time it meant something very simple. It meant that a person noticed

things. Noticed who was missing. Noticed who was hurting. Noticed what had been pushed into the dark.

When Jesus says “Keep awake,” he is calling us to that unvarnished kind of awareness. Not political posturing, but human attentiveness. Open eyes. Soft hearts. A spine that does not fold under pressure.

Years ago, I met with a man who told me he had spent most of his adult life sleepwalking. He called it “being productive.” Long hours, constant motion, no time to ask why any of it mattered.

Then one December, he slipped while hanging Christmas lights, missed a step, and found himself flat on his back, immobilized with a twisted knee. He spent days in a recliner staring out his living room window, watching the light shift.

It surprised him how much life passed within the frame of that single window. A father tugging a reluctant child toward school. Two teenagers sharing a set of earbuds, heads tilted together in a private world. A neighbour stopping to steady an older woman as she stepped over a patch of ice. Even the light itself seemed to participate, the pale winter afternoon leaning in as if to watch it all unfold.

“I didn’t know the world looked like that,” he told me. “I didn’t know how much I had stopped seeing.”

Then he paused. “It took a fall to wake me up.”

Jesus knows that most spiritual awakenings do not arrive politely. They rattle the furniture. They expose what we have tried to bury or ignore.

Yet they also bring clarity. A sudden sense that the ground beneath us is more fragile and more holy than we realised.

When Jesus speaks of the “days of Noah,” he is not recounting a children’s mural of animals marching into a boat. He is describing a society that went about its business without noticing the storm gathering at its edges. Weddings, dinners, conversations about crops or market prices. All normal. All harmless. All oblivious. The danger was not the rain. The danger was their indifference.

We are not so different. We build our routines like little shelters. We hope they will keep out the truth. We cling to calendars, errands, and familiar habits, believing that if we stay busy enough, the harder questions will stay outside like unwanted weather.

But Advent arrives with its small lamp and shows us the corners we have avoided. Wakefulness is not about panic. It is about honesty.

Jesus then speaks of two people in a field, two at a mill. They are doing the same work, standing in the same place.

Yet one is attuned to something beneath the surface and the other is not.

This is not about reward and punishment. It is about perception. Two people can live the same day and discover entirely different worlds. One sees only the surface. The other senses the tremor beneath it, the thin seam where grace is trying to break through.

Advent asks a quiet question. Which one are we becoming?

Another image follows: the householder who stays alert because something dear needs protection. Not fear but carefulness. When you love something, you pay attention. You look up. You listen. You do not sleep through the moment that requires your presence.

This is the heart of Advent. It is not about decoding prophecies or preparing for catastrophe. The heart of Advent is about noticing how God arrives in ordinary scenes. In a conversation at the grocery store where someone's voice cracks slightly when they say they are fine. In the worn face of the man at the bus stop who looks like he has run out of next steps. In the child who pulls at your sleeve because she has a question about the world and hopes you are the kind of grown-up who will tell her the truth gently.

Awake people notice these things. Asleep people walk past them. Jesus is asking us not to walk past.

Staying awake offers no reward. No applause waiting in the wings. It can leave a soft ache behind the eyes, like twilight lingering too long. Compassion is a weight you carry in your hands. Awareness, a thin winter wind that refuses to move aside.

And so we drift toward smaller shelters. The glow of a screen. A familiar routine. A quiet inner room where nothing unpredictable can reach us, and where sleep feels easier than seeing.

Yet Advent taps on the door of that room and asks us to come outside. There is a light rising at the edge of things. There is a story unfolding that includes us, whether we have signed up or not.

God is not interested in leaving the world as it is. The arrival of Christ, in whatever unexpected form it takes, always unsettles something. Hope is not tidy. It does not ask permission before it stirs the waters.

In Scripture, God rarely arrives with trumpets. God arrives through the barely noticeable. A young woman in a village. A pregnancy that raises eyebrows. A borrowed room. A manger that smells of hay and animal breath. Ordinary, almost forgettable, unless you happen to be awake.

To stay awake is to live as if the world is charged with presence, as if every moment carries the possibility of God's nearness. It means refusing to numb ourselves to

the cries we hear around us. It means recognizing the beauty that flickers even in bleak seasons. It means letting compassion interrupt our routines.

Advent does not ask us to be perfect. It asks for wakefulness. It asks for the courage to look at what is real and still trust that God is not finished with us. It asks us to believe that hope can slip quietly into a quiet room and change everything.

As we enter this season, perhaps the invitation is simple. Look up. Notice more. Soften where you have hardened. Carry a small lamp of attention into your days. The world is holding its breath. Something is drawing close.

This is the good news. In a world that grows weary and distracted, Christ keeps showing up. Not in spectacle, but in the small and the human. In the face of a neighbour. In the ache of our longing. In the whisper that tells us we are not abandoned. God is already moving toward us with tenderness strong enough to change the story.

Christ is near in ways we cannot predict. Christ is for us in ways we often forget. Christ comes to wake us gently, not to frighten us, but to gather us into a love that does not let go.

This Advent season and beyond, may we stay awake to the quiet wonder of his coming among us.

Amen.