Jesus offers a message that’s both a warning and a consolation. “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars…nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea. People will die of fright in anticipation of what’s coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” The language is called “apocalyptic”. The word apocalypse doesn’t mean the end of the world, but rather “unveiling,” “revelation”. Jesus is saying that something new is about to be revealed. The people of Jesus’ day didn’t have watches or GPS devices. They were able to tell time and get their direction from the sun, the moon, and the stars. They believed that the sun, moon, and stars were governed by cosmic forces which provided people knowledge of what time of day it was and what direction to travel. What Jesus is saying is that there will be a day when the cosmic forces that give us direction in life will be in dismay and this will be cause for concern. People will be frightened because the compasses they relied on in life will not work anymore. And we don’t need the end of the world for this to happen, a midlife-crises will do. Depression or disillusionment can cause our moral compasses to spin as well. How about the news? When the things in our world that give us direction fail, Jesus continues by saying, “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory. When these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” What Jesus is saying is that the apocalypse, the unveiling, the revelation, isn’t some future cataclysm. Jesus is referring to His passion, death and resurrection. Along with the sun, moon, and stars, one of the greatest certainties we all have is that we’re all destined to die someday. We don’t need the sun, moon, and stars to tell us that. Because of the resurrection, Jesus demonstrated that death isn’t the end. We no longer have to govern our lives over fears of our mortality. We no longer have to navigate our lives by the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars. As disciples of Jesus, we now navigate our lives by the light of Christ who alone has power over death. We will all stand before Him someday.

Advent is marked by two themes. The first theme is apocalyptic. We take time to remember that everything in the world is transitory. We remember that the sun, moon, stars, and the lights of popular culture will dim and fade. We focus our attention and set the compasses of our hearts towards the light of the Risen Christ as we await with vigilance His return in glory. The second theme of Advent is marked by uniting our hearts and minds with the ancient Jews like Jeremiah who kept vigil for the birth of the Messiah on Christmas morning. Preparing for the birthday of Jesus loses all its power unless we truly take the time to seriously contemplate the first theme of Advent. The first theme invites us to do a spiritual inventory of all the lights in the world we tend to follow, whether it be politics or politicians, news commentators, world events, worries around the workplace, or the dramas that unfold in the family. Whatever is leading our hearts into worry or fear, we’re invited to reset our compasses on the light of the Risen Christ who will come again in glory. Blue Violet is the color just after the darkest time of night. It’s that color of the sky just as morning begins to dawn, the first hint of light on the horizon. This is where we find ourselves many times during life. We find ourselves in a dark place, looking for the light of dawn on the horizon.

As we get closer to Christmas another candle is lit symbolizing that the Light of the World is coming soon so may we be blameless in holiness before God. We’ve lit the first candle. We’ve begun our solemn vigil. Whatever is causing us to worry or fear, we’re called to turn our gaze to the light of Christ dawning on the horizon that promises hope for salvation.