Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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November 8, 2026

In today's gospel, Jesus tells a parable about ten bridesmaids, ten lamps, and a wedding running so late that it gets dark. Everyone waits long enough to fall asleep. Then word comes that the groom is approaching, and five of the bridesmaids are short on oil. So, they turn to the others– the ones Matthew calls “wise” – and those bridesmaids say, essentially, “Sorry. If we give you some of ours, there might not be enough for us. Go buy your own.” And, I keep coming back to their response: Go get your own. It's a strange way to begin Advent—in the dark, with that uncomfortable exchange.

Today we begin a seven-week sermon series exploring artificial intelligence and Advent's incarnation. And our first topic is, cheerfully enough, AI and the end of the world. That might sound dramatic. But AI is advancing faster than we're considering its consequences. Some warn of threats to humanity's survival. Others point to dangers already here: disappearing jobs, thinking and creativity handed over to machines, and writing, artwork, and music used to train AI without permission or compensation. Think about that last one. Technology can be built using the creative work of countless people, while those same people have little say in how their work is used or who profits from it. And still we're told to keep moving. Faster. Bigger. More profitable. But who decides what counts as progress? And who is expected to pay for it?

Our denomination, the ELCA, released a theological foundation paper on AI this summer.[1] It calls for justice, wisdom, and human dignity without claiming final answers. Neither will we. Over these seven weeks, we'll let Scripture question us.

This week's election brought some of those questions into focus. For some, the past two years have felt like political darkness, and Tuesday offered a glimpse of light. For others, the election may feel like darkness arriving. But the consequences aren't equal. Consider Piqua, Ohio, where residents objected to a proposed data center and felt their concerns were being ignored. On Tuesday, voters recalled three commissioners who supported it and approved a ban on large data centers.[2] Similar concerns have been raised elsewhere. Then, on Thursday, technology stocks plunged, partly because investors feared greater scrutiny of AI development.[3] It's striking, isn't it? Communities ask for a say in what happens where they live, and the financial markets hear a threat. Now, it's not wrong to want a secure retirement or appreciate technology that makes life easier. I do too. But when we're more concerned about protecting what we have than about what happens to our neighbors, I wonder whether we're starting to sound a little like those bridesmaids.

And in the midst of that, here we are, in Advent. One candle lit on our Advent wreath. Just one. We know the world isn't right. Still, we seek the light. And that brings me back to the parable. Matthew calls five bridesmaids wise and

[1] https://cdn.elca.org/cdn/wp-content/uploads/ELCA_AI_Foundational_Paper_2026.pdf
[2] https://www.wosu.org/2026-11-04/piqua-voters-reject-data-centers-recall-city-commissioners
[3] https://apnews.com/article/stocks-markets-ai-midterm-oil-trump-7ee9c212805aa5e70cf34d25aab7a36e

five foolish. The prepared ones were wise, by one measure. But what do we know about the five without oil? Perhaps they couldn't afford more. Perhaps they had fewer opportunities to prepare. We don't know. Yet how quickly do we blame people who don't have enough? And then there are those supposedly wise ones. They had secured their own future. But when someone needed help, they sent them away. They had enough for themselves. And apparently, that was enough.

But what if, in all their wisdom, they'd simply said, “stay?” They might not have been able to divide their oil. But they could have shared their light. After all, a lamp doesn't shine only on the person holding it but it spreads around them. And that gets a bit uncomfortable. Because we as humans know how to protect our own resources. We enjoy convenience, efficiency, and profit. We sometimes call that wisdom. But we can become so concerned about what we stand to gain that we don't notice whom we're sending away.

Maybe this is part of what's at stake in our conversation about AI. Not simply whether a machine can complete a task faster, but whether we begin treating the people behind the work, and the people affected by our decisions, as expendable. Because being human is more than producing something useful. It's thinking and creating. It's listening to another person, working alongside them, and being physically present when someone is hurting. It's holding a child or sitting with someone who is dying. These aren't just inefficient tasks waiting to be replaced. This is embodied human life.

And that is the life God chooses to enter. God doesn't stand at a distance and tell humanity to go find its own light. God comes. In Jesus, God enters the darkness of this world. Not as someone who needs nothing and no one.

Not as the ultimate example of efficiency or independence. But as a baby. Vulnerable. Dependent on others to feed him, hold him, and keep him alive. Our God embraces the very interdependence we're so eager to outgrow. God doesn't wait for us to become wise, prepared, or productive enough. God comes in love.

We witnessed that promise earlier in baptism. Before Landon could accomplish anything to earn a place here, God claimed him as beloved. We promised to accompany him. And we gave him a candle. A reminder of Christ's light, given to him, with a community beside him to help carry it into the world. So too, in a moment, we'll sing the Great Litany. We'll name the world's suffering and ask for God's mercy together. Not because we've figured out how to save the world, but because we need God's grace and one another.

Ultimately, we don't know how AI will change humanity and our seven-week series won’t help us discover that. But what we do know is this: God has come among us in the flesh. Christ's light has entered the darkness. It's not a light we had to earn and it's not one we have to carry alone. So, may we grow in God’s light this Advent season and beyond. Amen.