

SUPPORTING UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN THEIR UNEXPECTED JOURNEYS

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MATTHEW 24:36-44 | KEEP WATCH AND PREPARE

For Christians all over the world, the four weeks leading up to Christmas are a time of preparation as we await the birth of Christ. At home, we put up and decorate a tree and hang stockings. At church, we light the Advent candles and put on Christmas pageants. But we know these four weeks are much more than preparing to celebrate an event that has already happened. They are about preparing, or as Matthew says, “staying awake,” for a future event, the return of our Lord.

On the surface, the gospel lesson for this week appears to be a proof-text for the rapture. But in fact, this Scripture serves as a call to the church that until Christ comes again, our work is not complete. We are not to be complacent and idle since we know not the hour or day. It will be a glorious and unexpected return, and so we must work actively to prepare the world for it.

A mother never expects to flee her home with her children, but that’s exactly the horrifying situation Kristina and her children found themselves in. They were living a peaceful life in Ukraine when the bombing started, and in a matter of moments their world turned completely upside down. After fleeing to a nearby school basement, they found themselves huddled in fear with others from their community and remained there for two weeks. Only sparingly did they dare to leave the basement, dashing home for a quick shower when they felt safe. It was during one of those outings, as bombs flew across the sky and her children ill from the poor living conditions, that Kristina realized she had to get out. Their very lives depended on it. That night, she took her family to the train station. As they were boarding, the station was bombed, but Kristina miraculously — and barely — still managed to escape to Poland with her children.



Kristina and her children found refuge and your love awaiting them after fleeing violence in Ukraine.

Once in Poland, Kristina and her children were welcomed with open arms. Volunteers provided food, drink and warm handshakes to let them know they were not alone. Because of the love of Lutheran World Relief donors, Kristina also received emergency cash funds that will give her the needed money to find an apartment and time to find a job.

As Christians, we believe that with the return of Christ, all will be put right. We are not there yet. As Kristina’s story so clearly shows, earth and heaven are not one. Our world still faces the devastation of war, poverty, homelessness and other injustices. We cannot stand idle and complacent, waiting for the day when it is “on earth as it is in heaven.”

We could live as if we were in a doctor’s office lobby, ignoring those who suffer around us, staring at our phones and waiting for someone to come through the door to call out our name. Or we can dare to have the courage of mothers like Kristina and the compassion of the volunteers who greeted her family. Stand watch and act. This gospel invites us to stay awake — for the sake of our neighbors — and prepare for the time we all await.

1. **The gospel writer encourages us to prepare for the unexpected and not be complacent while we wait. What are some ways in which we ignore the world and its problems around us?**
2. **How do you imagine the time will be when heaven and earth are one?**
3. **What are ways in which your congregation can stay awake and prepare for that time?**



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