

## Advent Reflections

### **First reflection - Advent Sunday**

Advent in Christian tradition is the four weeks before Christmas. Its name comes from a Latin word which means coming or arrival.

It is traditionally a time of preparation, when Christians are encouraged to reflect on two of the most momentous events in our world. The first coming, Jesus, God born as a human baby which we remember at Christmas time. He came in the flesh 2000 years ago, with no pomp and circumstance, no glare of publicity, but quietly and in humility. A baby destined to give His life on the Cross of Calvary as a ransom for many. The second coming, yet to take place when our Lord Jesus will return, this time in majesty and splendour, not as the lowly babe of Bethlehem, but as the glorious, almighty, all powerful King of kings and Lord of lords. At His first coming He offered salvation in grace and mercy, but at His second He will be imposing eternal and irreversible judgment ending in either heaven or hell.

The theme today is "Be prepared!" or perhaps "Are we ready?" and is based on Matthew's gospel chapter 24:36-44.

Many were caught out by the flood. Noah did not miss out, because he was tuned into what the Lord was doing.

The story of one person taken, another left, gives the message that what will happen, will happen quickly and implies that some people were not prepared.

The householder being ready to defend his property against the burglar tells us to be as vigilant as he is.

The beginning and end of the passage sum up the message:

- Verse 36. **No one knows about that day or hour . . .only the Father.** Any predictions of the end of the world or the Second Coming, which pinpoint a specific date and time, are false prophecy! They are contrary to the words of our Lord Jesus Himself.
- Verse 44. **So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.**

We need to be sure that we are ready to meet Jesus whenever he comes back or we are taken away from this life. This is the urgency of really knowing that we are children of God. If you do not know that you are child of God then you are not ready to meet the Lord, whenever He comes, or you leave this life.

*Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which Thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when He shall come again in His glorious Majesty to judge both the living and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through Him who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.* Common Worship - Collect for the first Sunday of Advent<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (2000). Copyright © The Archbishops' Council

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### ***Second Reflection - 2nd Sunday in Advent: Lighten our darkness***

In our first reflection we ended with the Collect (prayer) for Advent Sunday from the Book of Common Prayer which talks about casting away the works of darkness and putting on the armour of light. Reflecting on darkness and light have long been Advent themes.

Sometimes those who do not come from an Anglican or Catholic background are prone to be dismissive of the formal prayers found in the Prayer Book. Perhaps this is born out of a reaction to the persecution of non-conformists by the established church in the past. Extemporaneous prayer is often regarded as more 'spiritual' and prayers in formal prayer books seen as being 'vain repetitions'.

If these prejudices can be overcome then the liturgy of the Anglican Church can be found to be a treasury of inspirational material. The Book of Common Prayer was compiled in 1549, mainly by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, one of the great saints of the English Reformation. It was the first time all the material for the services of the church were in one volume. The advent of printing meant that its distribution was much wider than it would otherwise have been.

The Collects were prayers which 'collected' together the theme for a particular day or event into one main thought. Many of them were translations of ancient prayers from the collections known as 'Sacramentaries' of the 5th to 7th Centuries. Some of the best were composed by Cranmer himself and reflect the effect of the Reformation, particularly in the way he bases them on Scripture passages which are often familiar to us but for the majority of ordinary people in the 16th Century presented a revolutionary way of thinking and living.

The Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent is a prime example.

*Blessed Lord, which hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour, Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 3:16, Romans 15:4)<sup>2</sup>*

Cranmer saw the word of God as the cement, the cohesiveness, that held life together. When we digest food it becomes part of us and is converted into energy so as we digest God's word it becomes part of us and is converted into spiritual energy. It brings us strength (comfort) and leads us to a place of hope looking beyond the present to our glorious inheritance in Jesus Christ. It acts as light for our journey, a lamp to our feet (Ps 119:105)

Another of Cranmer's Collects used at the end of Evening Prayer begins "Lighten our darkness we beseech thee, O Lord" and this prayer reminds us that it is God's word that brings light into our darkness and into the darkness of the world, because it leads us to the true light, our Lord Jesus, who gives light to every man, and who has come into our world.

*Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> Book of Common Prayer  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid

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### ***Third Reflection - 3rd Sunday in Advent: Repent!***

One of the focuses of Advent is on Jesus' cousin, John. Our Bibles tend to talk of John the Baptist. It is interesting that in Tyndale's New Testament of 1526 he speaks of John the Baptizer. It was a Jewish practice to use an extension of a name to differentiate between people of the same name.

John's ministry was to prepare people for the kingdom of God through baptism. He was a humble man and said of Jesus, "He must increase and I must decrease."<sup>4</sup> Jesus Himself came to him for baptism. John prophetically proclaimed Jesus right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. When he saw Jesus approached he said, "Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

John's message in Matthew 3 was, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In announcing the Kingdom of God John links it with repentance. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus said exactly the same thing (Matthew 4:17). On the day of Pentecost when the crowd responded to Peter's sermon and asked what they should do, his answer was "Repent and be baptized."<sup>5</sup>

As we reflect on the ministry of John the Baptizer, let us remember that his key theme in proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God was repentance. This means a change of mind and direction and being prepared to admit when we are wrong and being sorry for our sin. The way into the kingdom of God is through Jesus, through believing and trusting in what He did for us when He suffered in our place at Calvary and paid the price for our sin. When we repent and turn around from following our old lives and put our faith in Jesus then the Bible tells us that we are born again. In John 3:3 Jesus tells Nicodemus that we cannot see the kingdom of God unless we are born again.

This is right at the heart of the Christian gospel and so in this Advent let us follow in the footsteps of John the Baptizer and proclaim the message of salvation: repent and believe! It is very easy to forget that behind the wonder of Christmas and the nativity stories there is a very serious message. John the Baptizer put it like this: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he that does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> John 3:30 (KJV)

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>6</sup> John 3:36



# Charlton & Blackheath Christian Fellowship

*Releasing people to be the people God created them to be*



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### ***Fourth Reflection - 4th Sunday in Advent: I am the Lord's servant.***

Traditionally, the last Sunday in Advent has focused on Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus. What an example she is to us. Here was a young girl, perhaps no more than 15 years old, who is told by an angelic messenger that she is pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Her reply was simple, "Let it be to me according to your word."<sup>7</sup> She knew that she could face death by stoning and yet she calmly accepts what she has been told, with amazing faith. Her quiet obedience and confidence are breathtaking and the understanding that grew in her about just who this child was shows a spiritual understanding not expected of women in that culture.

Luke reports her words after visiting her cousin, Elizabeth, and known today as the Magnificat, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour."<sup>8</sup>

The miracle of the virgin birth has long been a contentious subject for those who do not believe in the almighty power of the Living God. Mary accepted it with no hassles. She was chosen by God to be part of the amazing miracle of the Incarnation at a level we cannot even begin to understand. What were her innermost thoughts? We don't really know. She simply worshipped God in humble obedience, believing His word to her.

She was with the Lord Jesus throughout his life and is there by the cross at the end. We would do well to emulate her simple faithfulness and humble obedience.

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*CBCF meet at 10.30am every Sunday morning to worship, hear God's word and for fellowship  
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<sup>7</sup> Luke 1:38

<sup>8</sup> Luke 1:46-47