

ADVENT THOUGHTS

Advent, the season of spending and panic and possibly a few too many drinks as we anticipate Christmas, is very soon to start. It may even be under way when you read this.

Or Advent, a penitential season in which we prepare to reflect on the first arrival of Jesus to a hurting world over 2000 years ago and focus on the time when he will re appear in his glory at some unknown time in the future. Are we ready to meet Jesus when he comes?

It is a theme of many Advent Hymns, which often get obscured by too many renderings of "Away in a Manger" around the 3rd of December, or even before. Now I like hearing a group of children singing such carols as much as the next person, but we perhaps need a sense of proportion here. Many wonderful and insights into the season can get missed as Advent is kind of skated over, meaning December becomes Christmas.

One of my favourite Advent Hymns is Charles Wesley's fine "Lo, he comes with clouds descending", set to a tune called Helmsley. As we prepare to celebrate the arrival of the Christ Child we must not forget that he will come again, in a very different mode:-

Lo he comes with clouds descending, once for favoured sinners slain;
thousand thousand saints attending swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia! God appears on earth to reign.
Every eye shall now behold him robed in dreadful majesty;
those who set at naught and sold him, pierced and nailed him to the Tree,
deeply wailing, shall the true Messiah see.

You can find the rest of the hymn in any hymn book.

Jesus makes it very clear that the timing his return in judgement (and we hope, mercy) is known only to the Father. Even Jesus does not know this. I remember preaching a sermon on the first Sunday of Advent many years ago when I was a curate in Margate. I think I said "Well, we don't know when Jesus will return, but..."(pausing for effect and indicating the SW door covered in a large red curtain) "He could walk in through this door at any time" and lo and behold, the curtain parts.... and John walks in....he was a much loved member of the congregation who regularly came into services a bit late! There was a shocked silence and a strange frisson went round the church, then a few folk began to giggle nervously as the truth sank in. Afterwards I was congratulated on my immaculate timing and a few less charitable people enquired if I'd put John up to it...I said not, it was probably evidence of God's sense of humour.

As we consider this year's Advent, one like no other we have ever experienced, how will we live it? Is this an opportunity to live Advent in a way that we maybe haven't before, to read the Scriptures in a thoughtful way, to consider prayerfully our own readiness to meet our Saviour.

I don't want to end on a doomy note, so in this season we can also make time to prepare to enjoy the reality of Christmas, regardless of what politicians try to have us do, because what they say makes no difference whatsoever to the wonderful truth that God chose to become one of us and to enter our world. Cause for true celebration indeed.

Have a good Advent

Alice