

A few words from the Vicar

*Lo! he comes, with clouds descending,
once for our salvation slain;
thousand thousand saints attending
swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!
Christ the Lord returns to reign.
Charles Wesley*



Happy New Year!

A little early you might think. Well, no. The Church's year begins on Advent Sunday (1st December), so Happy New Year!

Advent is a time of expectation and preparation. It is the time of year when we prepare spiritually for Christmas, the season when we celebrate Jesus' incarnation, his coming amongst us, his becoming one of us in order to fulfil God's plan of salvation. But it is also a time for looking forward to Jesus' return as judge of all at the end of time.

During Advent the content of our worship directs us towards thoughts of Christ's birth but at the same time challenges our modern reluctance to consider the reality of divine judgement. Although the mood music for Advent is about expectation rather than penitence, the four last things – Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell – are traditional themes for the season.

So, is Christ's judgement really something to look forward to with eager expectation?

Well, it is true; some people *should* be deeply worried! Indeed, no matter how blameless others might think we are, a moment's self-examination should give any of us cause for concern. The reality is that all of us are in need of the salvation offered through Jesus Christ.

Yet, whilst Advent is a time to reflect upon our mortality, to acknowledge our shortcomings and to acknowledge Jesus as our judge, we do this in the context of God's overwhelming love for us. In this context judgement is not about guilt and punishment, crime and retribution (sighs of relief all round). Judgement as a biblical concept is about our being made righteous; we are made right with God so that, despite our sin, we are made perfect, with a clean record and without a stain on our character. Because of this, we can spend an eternity with God.

And this is where the incarnation comes in. For the baby Jesus we celebrate at Christmas did not remain wrapped in swaddling clothes in the crib. He grew up to become an itinerant Rabbi. He died on the cross and rose again so that all who believe in him need have no fear of his verdict on Judgement Day.

During Advent the liturgical colour is Purple, we light candles on the Advent wreath and traditionally church decorations were simple and spare.

These days, of course, quite early in the season, Christmas intrudes upon Advent. And let's not blame consumerism for this. Like many others, I look forward to seeing our Christmas

Tree in church in time for our Christingle service. Indeed, I love singing carols and find our Nativity service to be ever so cute! So, I'm not complaining.

I really don't mind the intrusion of Christmas into Advent. It's just that these days Advent needs a boost. So last year we introduced *Posada*. This involves figures of Mary (pregnant) and Joseph (see above) travelling from home to home during Advent. *Posada* gives each home the chance to create their own celebration, contemplate the coming of Jesus, and make room for Jesus in their lives.

We are doing *Posada* again this year and, to give Advent just a little extra boost, two Advent devotional services are scheduled for 7.30pm on 10th and 17th December. For me, these will be oases of calm amongst all the hustle and bustle of the Christmas preparations, whether it be planning the Christmas services or doing my Christmas shopping.

So, have a happy (Advent) New Year!

And, by the way, have a good Christmas too!

Dave