

## **Homily Advent 2 – Observing Advent**

Isaiah 11.1-10

Romans 15.4-13

Matthew 3.1-12

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Advent is a season for stillness, for quiet, for reflection and discernment. Paradoxically, it is both a quiet, inward and reflective season of active waiting, watching, listening, attentive and responsive, as well as being an outwardly very busy time of preparation. .

In the middle of much frantic preparation for Christmas going on in society around us we are keeping Advent..

It's good to keep an inward and quiet space, a sacred time, an uncluttered sanctuary, as far away as we can manage from the pressures and worries of the war in Ukraine, or the rising costs of living, of food and fuel, from concerns for increases in poverty, over consumption and indulgence. It is important to take time out if we can, to be still and to notice again our deep longing for love and loving relationships, and our equally deep longing for a saviour to bring us forgiveness and new life and hope.

It's time to look for the light in the darkness, in a time of shadows and short days, at a time in history when our planet needs our care and restoration and our societies are disturbed and fragmenting.

It is the beginning of the Church's year, a time for many other new beginnings and fresh insights into our part in bringing about God's kingdom of justice and of peace. But it begins quietly in prayer and in preparation, because Advent is that slightly strange time of preparing for, and of waiting for the Messiah to come again, the God who is with us, who has already arrived once before, as a child.

The early Christian writer Justin Martyr( very early around 100-165 AD) observed that at his first coming Christ would come in suffering and without honour or beauty, but at his second coming he will come in glory and in power to judge all people.

So it is time to hear again the words and stories of the Hebrew Bible and of the Hebrew prophets, and to wonder what they might mean for us in our own time, and how they help us to celebrate the Incarnation of God in the child Jesus, who comes to us, to be with us, to and share our human life, on the one hand - and to prepare ourselves on the other hand, for the time of judgement when He will come again in glory and power,

It is summed up neatly in the Advent collect He "came to us in great humility", the first time, "he will come again" for the second time in "glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead".

The beautiful words of the prophet Isaiah echo and resonate throughout Advent, he says in Ch 9 "the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. and in our reading today from Ch 11 he says "A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him". He goes to tell us what that time will be like, gives us some signs , so that we will recognise his coming, and so our passage continues telling us that we will know he is with us because God's spirit resting on him, is the spirit of wisdom and understanding ,the spirit of counsel and might ,the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD."

And we know that ever since Jesus came to us the first time with the message of repentance, the message of new life and the coming of God's kingdom, ever since then we have collectively been gradually changing. -

The values we now share in much of our society, about the importance of justice and mercy, of human rights, feeding the hungry, caring for the poor and the value and dignity of all people, as well as our own Christian understanding of women and men being made in the image of God. All these are completely

different values from those of the ancient world and of the Roman Empire into which Jesus was born. It was so extremely cruel that unwanted children were thrown onto rubbish heaps. It was so hierarchical that the people at the bottom of the social heap, including prisoners, slaves, captives in battle, women and children ( but only all those women and children who were not in your own family), especially those with disabilities, had no value and could be raped or tortured or killed in really cruel ways, or thrown into a ditch, or sold on to someone else, all on a whim, because they were seen as worthless, and certainly worth less than Roman citizens.

No wonder St Paul claimed his Roman citizenship when he was threatened, it was the only possible way to get a fair trial.

But Isaiah tells of the one to come “ His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD “They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

It was not like that when Jesus was born, it is still not like that now, but it is more like that now than it was then, though there is still such a long way to go, his message of unconditional love, of abundant life and of people individually being of infinite value, made in the image of God was so radical, so revolutionary, that it is still not fully accepted or put into practice.

Jesus’s own knowledge and understanding of the natural world as good, as blessed, as alive with God’s spirit and beautiful made by God, has not prevented his followers from misunderstanding, destroying and exploiting God’s creation. It is only relatively recently that we have collectively become aware of the impact that some of us human beings have had on the planet.

The Hebrew prophets, Isaiah Jeremiah and Ezekiel had long ago/before spoken to the Jews of forgiveness, liberation and the hope of salvation and we believe that Jesus came, as God with us, to bring those promises to fruition. His incarnation as the Son of God who became flesh as we are, who assumed a human nature and became both fully human and fully divine has brought us new and abundant life and showed us how to live, lovingly and fully, as the prophets foretold, and as God intended.

St Paul in his letter to the Romans recognises that Jesus came for all people, not just for a small group of chosen people like the Jews, but also for all of us Gentiles or non-Jews as well. Jesus’s coming into the whole world is the light to overcome the darkness.

As we prepare to celebrate his again first coming at Christmas, so in Advent we now live, again waiting and watching in that hope and expectation that Christ will come again.

John the Baptist is the fulfilment of the prophetic tradition, as he like his Old Testament ancestors calls for repentance, for preparation to receive the messiah, and proclaims His imminent arrival as “the one who is more powerful than I who is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Ultimately, it is a mystery, both how and when Jesus will return, and so to prepare ourselves all we can realistically do, is faithfully to love God, our neighbours, and ourselves to care for God’s creation and to tread lightly, gratefully and lovingly on the earth. So that whenever He comes we will be ready...

May the Lord, when he comes,  
find us watching and waiting . Amen