

The Season of Advent

***if you are fed up with Christmas by 25th December,
then, perhaps you have not done Advent properly!***

In November, we have been praying for the faithful departed, those who have died and who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. On Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day, the occasion is marked with the bugler playing the Last Post.

Click to play

[[Last Post](#)]

There is a respectful, reflective, and sombre feel to the bugler's playing and a fitting way to end the day, so that we may be at rest. As Cardinal Newman prayed, *'may the Lord support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in his mercy may he give us a safe lodging, and a holy rest and peace at last'*.

The Last Post is never the last word, for in the morning at the start of a new day, the bugler wakes everyone up with Reveille:

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[[Reveille](#)]

This is more upbeat, a summons to a new day, to new opportunities and new possibilities for service. Staying with this idea, Advent, which marks the beginning of a new year for the Church is our wake-up call. Indeed, the 1st Sunday of Advent (Year B), picks up on this idea of staying awake, as the Lord turns to us and says: *"So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming... If he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to you all: Stay awake!"* (Mark 13:33-37).

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[[Wait for the Lord](#)]

Perhaps we should back up, what is Advent and what does the word mean?

It comes from the Latin word '*Aventus*', which means a coming, an approach and an arrival. So, what is coming, approaching, or arriving? (i.e. what are we preparing for?).

The obvious answer is Christmas! The adverts on television will certainly bombard us with the fact that Christmas is coming. Coca Cola was, perhaps, the first mainstream Christmas advert and is said we know Christmas is coming when we see it on TV:

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[[Holidays are Coming](#)]

Coca Cola get many things right but at the same time get it so wrong. Yes, holidays are coming or more appropriately a '*holy day*' is coming, which is Christmas Day, the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. They have a picture of Santa Claus or more appropriately, it is a caricature of Saint Nicholas who comes in his Red Chasuble, Mitre and dispenses the gifts of God in the Holy Spirit. We should resist the secular temptation to remove '*Christ*' and the '*Mass*' from Christmas, for if we do, there is very little left!

A better question than '*what is coming or arriving?*' would be '*who is coming?*' or '*whose arrival are we waiting?*'

"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us". The Incarnation: Christ, '*God from God, light from light, true God from true God*' is born as Jesus of Nazareth and dwells amongst his people.

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[[O Come O Come Emmanuel](#)]

But! However! Has not Jesus already arrived? Yes, the birth of Christ is an historical event so when we celebrate the Nativity of the Lord, we are not looking to repeat this event but to ask the Lord to be reborn in our hearts.

Therefore, our focus in the first half of Advent, until 16th Advent, is a focus on the Second Coming of Christ.

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[[Lo He Comes With Clouds Descending](#)]

We are faithfully waiting for the Lord to return and come again. At Mass, we proclaim the mystery of faith: *'We proclaim your death O Lord, and Profess Your Resurrection, until you come again'*

Proclaiming the gospel is not a historical narrative. It is an event. Christ speaks to us today, and his teachings are relevant now and forever, world without end. The 'good news' we announce speaks of freedom; a physical release from exile for the people to whom Isaiah speaks, and from the bondage of sin and death for the people of the gospel.

Click to play

[[Go tell everyone](#)]

Although we might not, as John says, be fit to kneel down and untie his sandals, Jesus as the Christ, is, for us, the fulfilment of the consolation promised by the prophet Isaiah. John the Baptist calls us to what we call '*metanoia*', a repentance, a complete change of our mind and heart. Advent is a time of renewal; do we prefer to receive good news, or do we hunger after gossip and scandal?

As we have already said, it is a time to stay awake, to repent and believe the good news, and by the grace of God in the sacraments (a third arrival of Christ), to be brought from darkness into the light. As Jesus himself says, "*I am the light of the World*" says the Lord "*he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life*".

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[[Christ be our Light](#)]

Advent, then, is a season of preparation and it is for his second coming that we are primarily preparing for, but the words of the Gospel which prepared the people for his first coming are still relevant and useful. St John the Baptist calls us to a conversion: *“Look, I am going to send my messenger before you, he will prepare your way. A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight”*.

Click to play

[[On Jordan's bank the Baptist's Cry](#)]

Advent is a time for us to make a highway for Christ our King, so he might bring us home to the heavenly kingdom. To *‘prepare a way for the Lord’* means to preach the birth of our Saviour, the Word of God who lives among us, and by whose death and resurrection becomes the means by which people are offered consolation from the certainty of dying. It is therefore an announcement of *‘good news’* and to ensure it reaches the ends of the earth there must be heralds of the gospel. At the ordination of a Deacon, the bishop places the Book of the Gospels in his hands and says, *‘Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.’* By virtue of our common priesthood, we all share in the commission to bring this good news to others. The ordained ministry, vital though it is, does not mean that others are excluded from the work of evangelization. As attributed to St Francis of Assisi, all of us must *‘preach the gospel continually, and if necessary, use words’*. As Christians our life might be the only gospel that a person ever reads. It will be our concern for the poor, innocent and vulnerable that will speak volumes, and indeed, *‘prepares a way for the Lord’*.

From 17th December, we may turn our attention to the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Saviour is announced to Mary: *“Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you... Mary do not be afraid for you have won God’s favour... You are to bear a Son, and you must name him Jesus”*. We think especially of the response of Our Lady who at the Annunciation of the Lord declares, *‘I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to thy Word’*.

Click to play

[[The Angel Gabriel](#)]

The annunciation reveals to Our Lady how she fits into God's saving plan. She is ready to say 'yes' because her life so far has been a search for God, but she discovers that she's been in the mind of God for eternity. Regardless, the request to be the *'Mother of God'* remains an invitation. The affirmation *'full of grace'* confirms her Immaculate Conception, meaning God has already filled her soul, moulding her heart to the shape of his Son, truly making her a singular vessel of honour to 'house' the Word of God. Her reply, *'let it be done unto me according to thy word'*, reflect how her parents had prepared her by offering her for service in the Temple, allowing her to be predisposed to the will of God, even if she doesn't fully understand *'how'* this is all to be achieved. Her generous *'fiat'*, then, makes Our Lady *'blessed among woman'*. Through the Holy Spirit, she becomes the Mother of God and also the Mother of all the living, because she is the Ark of the New and Eternal Covenant, whose blood is poured out for many for the forgiveness of their sins. Unlike her peers who travelled to the Temple in Jerusalem to encounter God, she becomes a living Temple granted intimate access to the holy of holies dwelling inside her. The annunciation teaches us to cherish life as a gift from God, from the moment of conception (until natural death). Hence the inscription in the *'holy house'* of Nazareth, *'here the Word became flesh'*. Our Lady is an example of constancy. Remaining sinless, she listens attentively to the *'Word of God'*. She abides as the *'handmaid of the Lord'*, remaining forever at his side, taking station at the cross and sharing the wounds of his passion in her heart, before being crowned *'Queen of Heaven'*.

Click to play

[[Regina Coeli](#)]

The annunciation reveals the hidden mystery between God and his people. The child born of Mary will be *'great and called Son of the Most High'*; he is the culmination of God promises to his people. The name 'Jesus', means *'God saves'*, therefore if we remove Christ and his saving Mass from Christmas, we are left with an empty cross because we have no saviour. That means the party has no life in it. Instead, at Christmas we celebrate that the heavens have dropped down, for us, the just one; a saviour who frees us from ourselves.

Click to play

[[Drop Down Ye Heavens From Above](#)]

Our Emmanuel, *'God with us'*, raises us to a new dignity of divine sonship and into eternal life.

On the four Sundays of Advent we will light the candles of the Advent Wreath, and they have meaning:

1. **Purple Candle:** Hope: The Prophet's Candle
 - a. *The Messiah to coming and will be with us soon.*
2. **Purple Candle:** Faith: The Bethlehem Candle
 - a. *The Messiah is born to the least of the tribes of Judah, and so God will raise up the lowly.*
3. **Rose Candle:** The Shepherd's Candle
 - a. *I bring you news of great joy, this is the disposition of the redeemed.*
4. **Purple Candle:** Candle of Peace
 - a. *Do not be afraid, you have found favour with God.*
5. **White Candle:** The Candle of Light
 - a. *Christ enlightens all we thing, say and do.*

Click to play

[[Children's Advent Candle Song](#)]

The Prophet Isaiah

The Prophet Isaiah will be our guide throughout Advent and his Ministry is 740BC to 698BC, and he speaks to us of the coming of the Messiah, salvation for the whole world and provides hope in regard the end times. Firstly, let us quickly remind ourselves of the History of the People of Israel.

- ▶ Egypt – Passover & Exodus
 - ▶ 40 years wandering in the Desert,
 - ▶ The giving of the law (10 commandments)
- ▶ Entry into the Promised Land
 - ▶ 12 Tribes
 - ▶ Period of the Judges
 - ▶ Period of the Kings – Saul, David & Solomon
- ▶ Division: (10) Northern and (1) Southern Kingdoms split
 - ▶ Northern Kingdom wiped out
- ▶ Smaller Southern Kingdom (David's House of Judah) survives
 - ▶ Exile – a return to captivity
- ▶ Return from Exile – (hope) returning home, a new Exodus

There are 66 chapters in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, so we shall consider a selection of them:

Chapter 2: Gathering the nations into the peace of God's Kingdom:

"In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

Where is the mountain of the Lord?

Jerusalem, the Heavenly Jerusalem?

What is the House of the God of Jacob?

The Temple, the future Church, Heaven?

Teach us his way?

Gospel

Click to play

[[Christmas Hymn Go Tell it on the Mountain](#)]

Chapter 6: The Call of Isaiah

"In the Year King Uzziah died (733BC) Isaiah has a vision of angels and one called to another: *'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.'*

- When do we sing the Sanctus (Holy Holy...)?
- At Mass – heaven and earth are combined, and we join all the saints and angels

Click to play

[[Sanctus. Missa de Angelis](#)]

"I heard the voice of the Lord saying, *'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'* And I said, *'Here am I; send me!'*

- Isaiah feels unworthy to be a prophet – why might he feel unworthy?
- God's holiness cleanses Isaiah of his sinfulness

- A generosity and trusting response:
- *(Here I am, Lord. Is it I Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart (Daniel Schutte))*

Click to play

[[I, The Lord Of Sea And Sky](#)]

- Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord; Go in peace glorifying the Lord by your life.

Chapter 7: The Prophecy of Immanuel

- ▶ What is a prophecy?
 - A prediction of a future (holy) event?
 - Isaiah Reassures King Ahaz (King of Judah) – tells him not to enter an alliance with the King of Israel & King of Syria against Assyria
 - The Lord will himself give you a sign. Look, the young woman (virgin) is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.
 - Who did the Gospel Fathers think this future Virgin might be?
 - Mary
 - Who then is the child?
 - Jesus – this would be a miraculous birth
 - King Hezekiah – the promise that the Davidic dynasty would continue

Click to play

[[O Come, O Come Emmanuel](#)]

- What does Immanuel mean?
 - God is with us
 - A period of peace: blessing and prosperity

Chapter 9: The Prince of Peace

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them a light has shined...

- What do we associate Darkness with?
 - Sin, evil, lies
- What do we associate Light with?
 - Goodness, truth, and holiness

Isaiah's time: Hezekiah marks the end of the alliance with Assyria

Post Exile: a Messiah figure

What qualities do we want this Messiah to have?

- For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his Kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

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[[Handel: Messiah, For unto us a child is born](#)]

- He will be as wise as David, be a liberator, guide, and father like Moses, have the virtues of the early patriarchs would made peace not war with their neighbours
- St Bernard says: He will be wonderful in his birth, a counsellor in his preaching, mighty in his Passion, and everlasting Father in the Resurrection and Prince of Peace in eternal blessing

Chapter 11: A Peaceful Kingdom

The Northern Kingdom has been destroyed; some of Judah is gone to, but a remnant will be saved

- ▶ Chapter 11 – The Peaceful Kingdom
 - A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of

wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord

- David's Kingdom used to be enormous – now only a tiny Kingdom – but replanted it will grow!
- Luke Chapter 4 – The spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me and sent me to bring the good news to the poor...
- The Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation

'The spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me and sent me to bring the good news to the poor'. We become messengers and comforters to those who have reached rock bottom (physically and / or spiritually) showing them that we trust the Lord to seek out the lost sheep so that we may all have life and have it in abundance; because that is what we believe he does for us in the most holy Eucharist. We are, just like John the Baptist, sent by God to give witness to the light. Although, we are not worthy to untie the straps of Christ's sandals, we must still give faithful testimony to the truth. John recognized that Divine Truth had entered the world and he was prepared to give his life so that the Truth could be seen and heard. John's testimony is one of humility; he recognises that it is Christ who matters most in his life, famously saying, *'He must increase, but I must decrease'*.

Click to play

[[The Spirit Lives to Set Us Free \(Walk in the Light\)](#)]

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. 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.

- An image of the first creation when everything was in harmony with God
- An image of paradise

[click to play]

[[Morning Has Broken](#)]

Chapter 12: Thanksgiving and Praise

- ▶ You will say in that day: I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Click to play

[[Praise to the Lord the Almighty the king of creation](#)]

Chapter 25: The Lord's Banquet & Songs of Salvation

- ▶ On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all the nations. He will swallow up death for ever and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'
- ▶ A victory celebration – the Messiah's victory – what is our greatest enemy?
- ▶ God provides a banquet which surpasses anything that we could imagine – how does God feed us?
- ▶ The Mass as a foretaste of heaven
- ▶ In heaven we will see God face to face in the Father's house, our true home

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[[The Lord's my Shepherd - Stuart Townend](#)]

Chapter 40:9-11: Return from Exile

- ▶ Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!' Behold, the Lord God come with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.'
 - ▶ The cross is lifted in Jerusalem
 - ▶ The gates of heaven are open to us and we can claim the reward of eternal life. Who is the Shepherd and who are the lambs?
 - ▶ The Church is the Sheepfold and Christ is the Good Shepherd?
- ▶ Exile? Where is our true home? We are citizens of heaven

Click to play

[[Our God Reigns](#)]

Go and announce the Gospel the Lord

Click to play

[[Ite missa est, alleluia](#)]