

## **Advent Sunday 2022**

Isaiah (2:1-5), Romans (13:11-14) Matthew (24:37-44)

### ***Looking back and forward into light***

At the beginning of this new year it's probably worthwhile reminding ourselves of some basic points about our faith, the church year, use of scriptures, seasons and symbols to help us journey with Jesus afresh.

The Sunday Gospels this year, with the exception of the Easter are taken from the Gospel of Saint Matthew. Hence year A is also known as the Year of Matthew. It's worth reminding ourselves that Matthew is represented by an angel – the messenger. The message within Matthew emphasizes the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises – Matthew the tax collector is Jewish but a very changed Jew who has found fulfilment love redemption and hope in Jesus. He may have been despised by his fellow men because of his profession and collusion with an earthly emperor in the guise of Rome but has been loved by the Son of God our Heavenly King. The Jewish nature and fulfilment will shine through in Matthew.

The word Advent is a term derived from the Latin 'Adventus' which means coming. There are two comings that we are asked to focus on this short season of but 4 weeks: the two comings of Christ. We think of them in a slightly roundabout way – the second coming comes first and the first comes second.

So from now to 16<sup>th</sup> December we are called to think about the end of time (and naturally as a by product we will contemplate our own end too). At the end we are promised the second coming of Christ when he will come to quote the creed "in glory to judge the living and the dead."

After this from the 17<sup>th</sup> December to Christmas Day we prepare ourselves to give thanks for the first coming of Christ over two thousand years ago in the town of Bethlehem in Judaea which will be commemorated at Christmas. Again in the words of the creed; "for us and for us our Salvation He came down from heaven and by the Holy Spirit, was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man."

One of the marks of this season, which is a lesser penitential season, a season of preparation is that the church is more simply decorated. There

are no flowers and the colour used is purple. It is the royal colour the imperial colour of the Roman Empire because we are preparing to greet our King both at Christmas and at the end.

We know of course when we celebrate Christmas – it is the 25<sup>th</sup> December – not because that was when Jesus was born but because that was the official day of the Emperor's birthday and Jesus replaces all other rulers in the throne of our hearts.

We don't know when our own end will be and even less the end of time. The readings of today lift our minds and heart in expectation towards the One Who will "come again to judge the living and the dead" and call us to prepare to welcome Him. But there a big BUT. The gospel warns us to stand resist those who claim, in different forms and manners, to know the exact date the world will end. The world seems a dangerous, difficult and challenging place at the moment – it is not the place of Christians to give up in gloom and doom and say it's all coming to end and pass judgement on everybody and everything like an Emperor of Rome giving his thumbs up or down! No: God's time, God's place, God's call.

Nevertheless the Lord Himself makes clear in today's Gospel Reading "stay awake, because you do not know the day when your Master is coming." Staying awake means to be ever ready, never succumbing to the ways of the world, of evil, of darkness and gloom, but being always prepared to meet with the Lord, and to do so in the light of his first coming.

God is Light and He comes to make us luminous and transparent and to dispel darkness and gloom. The graces of God who is all light are meant to shine from us but there is so much that shades out that light. So part of our advent preparation should be recognizing what shades out God's light in our lives and letting him cast it aside. Such living in light is at the heart of Paul's message to the Romans.

The One we are expecting at the second coming is Light and the same light we give thanks for at his first coming in Bethlehem. Note that the story of the Magi the wise folk following light to the Light of the World is only in Matthew very Jewish Gospel. Note too how this resonates with the very beginning of the Jewish Bible where God says ***let there be light***. God does not create it, he allows it to be because ***it*** already exists. It is Himself that he reveals and will fully reveal in Christ.

In Him there is no darkness and this light establishes the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom breaks into this world in the here and now through the Body of Christ, the Church. The rays of this Light are to fill the hearts of all –especially those who have accepted the invitation to follow the light like the Magi. What is celebrated at the first Christmas is what is to be embraced at the end of time and our time whenever that may be.

The other day I took a funeral of a 95 year man at St.David's Eastwood. A little late to the faith I knew him only a little but principally from last Easter when I celebrated the Easter Vigil for them on the Saturday night before our Dawn celebration here. Afterwards he thanked me profusely and said he felt he had glimpsed into heaven. In the darkness of the church with the Light of Christ shining in his heart from the Easter candle he said "I know the best is to come" I will try and ponder his words and faith for my own advent this year: looking back with thanksgiving but forward with hope.

I hope you have a blessed new year with the light of Christ; past present and future in your hearts and as your guide.

*The Revd Fr.David Wylie RN  
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