

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT Year A

2 December, 2007

1. **Advent is a time of yearning**—yearning not for personal happiness and what we will get for Christmas but a deep seated yearning for the peace of the world. The Bible pictures such a state as a new creation—a new heaven and a new earth which are not envisaged within history, rather they belong to God when God's purpose has been fulfilled. Only when the nations have learnt God's ways and walk with him will peace come. The end of war is not possible in history.
2. **Since the end of the Cold War**, the number of wars has been declining. This is good news. There have only been four wars between countries since 1991; Ethiopia versus Eritrea (1998-2000), India versus Pakistan Iraq versus Kuwait (1991), and Iraq versus Coalition (2003). There are 15-20 wars going on right now, mostly within countries and many cases of civil disorder. based mostly on ethnic grounds. As Jesus said, "There will always be wars and rumours of war". Despite the good news of fewer wars, we know from our television sets that the world is far from peaceful.
3. **Peace does not rest in a human plan.** Romans 13.9-14 interprets Christian existence as a life of tension. We live within our present age in history, but we look forward to a time to come, a reign of peace which only God can inaugurate. (Isaiah 2.1-5). We live in the darkness but we look forward to the light, so we can live now as if that light is already with us.
4. **So what does it mean for us today?** We need to think globally and act locally and personally.
  - Be involved in life-giving, not life-destroying activities. Share your wealth, build community, bring joy, develop talents, encourage others, being alert to their needs..
  - Be agents of reconciliation. Strive for peaceful homes and communities. Seek justice, not trouble.
  - Show love to all people; welcome people from other races and places. Make friends with people different from yourself.
  - 'Put on the Lord Jesus' (Romans 13.14) , that is, live out your baptism, renouncing evil, turning to Christ, letting the Spirit flourish in you, shining as a light in the world.
4. **Advent is like a wake up call.** Wake up to what is not life-giving in your own life and do something about it. Pray for the renewal of the hope we have in the coming reign of Christ

1. **We use that little word 'hope' a lot about expectations of the future.** *I hope to go to Adelaide tomorrow. I hope my grandchild will pass the exams. I hope we've got enough money...* But hope is more than just about expectations; it is a quality of life on which emotional and spiritual health depends. Lack of hope leads to sadness and depression. Some see no reason to carry on seeing no future, no purpose, and no pleasure in life.
2. **Advent is a celebration of hopefulness.** The hopes and dreams of generations of Jews had focused on the reign of a king like King David. (Isaiah 11.1-10). John pointed to Jesus as the one to fulfil that hope (Mat. 3.1-12) and the early christians rejoiced in the one who was the hope of the whole world (Romans 15.4-13)
3. **In Advent we prepare celebrate** the whole mystery of the incarnation, the doctrine of 'God made flesh', 'Immanuel', 'God with us'. We rejoice that Jesus is the person in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, whose life showed us what it is to be truly human. He offers to us the hope that we too might be fully human and live life abundantly. We repent that humanity has fallen short of what we might be.
4. **It is this hope which can give meaning to our lives.** What are we here for? One answer might be is that we are here to fulfil our potential as human beings. We are made in the image of God, yet marred by those things we think and do and say which fall short of God's expectations. We believe that Jesus was the one in whom the fullness of God is seen, and that we are called to be like him. He therefore is our hope, our expectation of what might be for us. God dwelt in him in his poverty and vulnerability as a child, in his ministry of compassion, bringing wholeness to others, in his suffering and death, and in his resurrection and ascension. If, like him, we follow a life of service, love and compassion in obedience to God we will know 'God with us', we will have hope of resurrection and eternal life with God.
5. **These hopes are more than personal.** They are universal hopes for humanity. So Jesus is the hope of the world, the one who can restore humanity, the one who can bring peace, the one who will usher in the new creation, when the whole world acknowledges him as king.

1. **Hebrews 2.10-18** states just why Jesus, the Son of God, became truly human and was born 'as one of us'. The writer spells out for them the meaning of Christ's life and death in order to encourage the gentile but Jewish christians to stand firm in their faith in the face of opposition. The writer is not concerned with the events of Jesus' birth, and does not give meaning through a narrative. His is a theological explanation.
2. **Through sin, human experience falls far short** of what it might be for those born in the image of God. Into our imperfect world came Jesus .who by his sufferings and victory over sin and death, offered humankind a way to become what God intends for us. In Christ we become like him, children of God and heirs of the kingdom. We become whom we are meant to be, through God's grace.
3. **Jesus the pioneer of our salvation.** He began a journey of servanthood and self-denial and provided a way for others to enter into that journey too, leading us to life with the Father. He was tested and *made perfect through suffering*. Perfection meaning completion of the purpose of his life showing us how we can do the same.
4. **Through suffering, Jesus identified with our human condition** Despite his divine origin, he entered into our human existence. He lived in a village, had family, went to school, and worked; his parents didn't always understand him; he lost friends to death; he knew temptation and testing, derision and aggression, being misunderstood and being betrayed by friends. Such a one is therefore the one who can perfectly mediate for us with the Father. He can be our high priest.
5. **The Prayer of Thanksgiving** (p. 128 APBA) rehearses our understanding of God's purpose in Jesus—"We give you thanks and praise...deliverance for his people.". Christ's death and resurrection are meaningless without the incarnation, and the incarnation meaningless without death and resurrection. This is the mystery of our faith, not always understood, but always giving us strength to believe and to live our lives 'in Christ', through whom we have the power to become truly human like him, and like him, raised to glory with the Father.

**CHRISTMAS DAY Year A**  
**25 December, 2007**

1. **Prophecy, history and symbolism** combine in the lovely narrative of Jesus' birth. (Luke 2.1-20). *Prophecy*: Bethlehem, the city of David, promised by Micah 5 as the birthplace of a prince of David's lineage, who would become shepherd of the scattered flock of Israel, standing in the glory of the Lord, and extending his authority and peace to the ends of the earth. *History*: Luke attests to the use of God of gentile people to achieve his purpose. Caesar Augustus is an unwitting player in the historical drama of God incarnate. *Symbolism*: God came as a vulnerable child, one for whom there was no room later to become the man for whom the Temple authorities had no room, the king who had a cross instead of a throne. The lowly shepherds, poor, dirty, and outcast because of lack of religious observance are the first of the outcast, vulnerable and needy to come to Jesus. The angel and the heavenly host sing of the jubilation of heaven and earth at the birth of the one who would be the herald of the new creation.
2. **The wonder, awe and obedience in this story** sum up the feelings of generations of Christians down the ages. The wonder of the nativity scene— baby, parents, shepherds, angels; the acceptance of joy of hearing the story year after year. The awe at the realization of the meaning of the story: God dwells with his people; God is to be seen in the vulnerable, the outcast, the lowliest of all, yet through such a one human life in obedience to the Father will be lived abundantly, humanity raised in the kingship of Christ. The obedience of Mary and Joseph, the obedience of the shepherds, who came with praise and thanksgiving are models of the service we are called to give.
3. **O come let us adore him** entering into that same wonder, awe and obedience, acknowledging God with us, and looking towards the reign of the Prince of Peace in all the earth

**THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT Year A**  
**16 December, 2007**

1. **“Are you the one who is to come**, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus did not answer John directly but pointed to what could be seen happening. Look at what God is doing, he says. He did not claim miracles for himself but pointed to his works and words as signs of God's presence and activity through him. (Matthew 11.2-11). His answer echoes the language of Isaiah 35.1-10, John would recognise it.
2. **John's question so long ago is our question today.** How do we see Jesus? Do we think Jesus' works and words signs of God's working through him? Or are they trivial actions in the past which make no claim on us today? And what about the Church, which we call the Body of Christ? Do we believe that God is at work through Jesus in his Church today? Do we see signs of the kingdom in the world, or are we blinded by the works of darkness?
3. **“Open our blind eyes to the dawning of your kingdom”.** It is easy to focus on the ills of the world and the Church. They are certainly heavy on our hearts and in front of us. We can be blind to those small signs of God's presence: unconditional love, undeserved forgiveness, compassion and encouragement, the overcoming of injustice, a victory for a little person. Perhaps you can just think over the last week of some sign of the kingdom you have encountered.
4. **Like the first Christians** who waited impatiently for the coming of Christ in glory (James 5. 7-10), we need patience to live as people of the kingdom now, while we wait with expectation and hope for a time when the whole earth will become God's new creation. In our life in the Spirit, we too can be a sign and a promise of God's kingdom. We pray that God will strengthen our weak hands so that they may be used in service of others, make firm our feeble knees so that we can pray for others, and sustain us with love on our journey towards the new creation. “In faith and hope and love,/ in joyful trust we move/ towards our Father's home above” (McAuley)
5. **Advent is a time of patient waiting**, ever looking for signs of God's activity in the world. As we wait for Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Christ, we also wait for a time when the whole earth will 'live to praise his name'. (Post-communion prayer)

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT    Year A**  
**23 December, 2007**

1. **The experience of Jesus** was overwhelming for the early Christians. In Jesus' lifetime they did not understand his works and his words; at his death they were confused and fearful, at his resurrection they disbelieved yet were in awe and wonder and after Pentecost empowered with new life. They struggled to make sense of it. All. Paul's opening words to the Romans (1.1-7) cover many things including Jesus' humanity and divinity, obviously he and others were beginning to figure it out..
2. **The Jews interpreted Jesus in the light of their existing faith.** The prophecy in Isaiah 7. 10-16 applies a sign from the prophet to Ahaz the king, to the birth of Jesus. Originally it was a sign concerning the continuation of the dynasty of King David, a sign that God is with his people—Emmanuel. Isaiah was dealing with his own historical situation but the early Christians found the prophecy's fulfillment in the birth of Christ to the virgin Mary. Jesus is the true "God with us"
3. **What Paul expresses theologically in verses 3-4 the gospel writer expresses in narrative form.** (Matthew 1.18-25) The story of Jesus' miraculous birth is an affirmation that in Christ, God is with us. Jesus is not a product of evolution; not a superior human because of his moral choices, not the highest achievement of humanity, but one in whom God dwelt so richly that his life can be seen only as the intervention of the transcendent God in human history.
4. **In the creeds we affirm the mystery of the incarnation:** Jesus "was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary", "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary". In reciting these we affirm the faith of the apostles and the early church, that God is with us in the person of Jesus. This is the mystery of the incarnation: God loves us so much that he gave us his Son to be with us and to remain with us in Spirit.
5. **What difference does belief in 'God with us' make in our lives?** It means we are not alone; we are loved unconditionally; we are forgiven when repentant of our shortcomings; we are given an example to follow; we are given power to serve each other; there is meaning in life; and we have hope in the future. Belief in the incarnation of our God is the beginning of belief in a new creation and abundant life.

**CHRISTMAS EVE Year A**  
**24 December, 2007**

1. **Christmas lights!** Candles on the table, on the Christmas tree, light displays in town, lit up store windows, —we associate Christmas with light; we respond to colour and warmth and light as signs of life. We instinctively understand the metaphor. In the church tonight we too light our candles to celebrate the birth of Christ, the light shining in the darkness.
2. **The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.** The early Christians interpreted Isaiah's prophecy for his time as having meaning in Jesus. So we today still love the words of this prophecy and resonances of verse 6 come to us ringing in Handel's Messiah, and Christmas carols. Every generation has its darkness, every person has his/her darkness. Christ's love, Christ's colour and warmth, Christ's light, can shine on our darkness to give sight, meaning and hope.
3. **Light shone on the shepherds.** Pastoral scenes adore our Christmas cards and the nativity scene shows a pretty scene of shepherds honouring Jesus. The truth is that life was pretty grim for them. On the bottom of the social scale, owning no land, hired to care for someone else's sheep, working in dirty, dangerous and isolated areas, poorly fed, poorly clothed, often hungry, their lives held little light. And the Lord came to them in blinding light. God had come in his glory. The baby was a sign—"this will be a sign for you". Jesus was the sign that God was with them. The Emmanuel promised in Isaiah, echoed in "to you is born this day...a child". The one who would bring light to their oppressed, outcast, dark world, who would tell them that God loved even the least of them, who would bind their wounds and heal them, who would bring them into his fold, rather than sending them out into the desert. God's glory shone around for light had come into their dark world.
4. **Jesus is our world's light.** His love for the marginalized, the little ones of the world, his challenge to those entrapped by the love of worldly things or guilt in lives that have fallen short. His assurance that each of us is of value to God, his compassion for those whose lives need healing, his forgiveness, bring light and hope to our world. Emmanuel, God is with us. God shared life on earth all those years ago, coming in the form of a child, in outcast circumstances, with the promise of kingship is the one who offers hope to all humanity.