

Advent: 'Ready and Waiting'

In the UK we are entering the season in which darkness seems to expand daily. Soon enough we will wake up to darkness and return home to darkness in the afternoon. Sometimes this is reflected in our mood as we become more aware of the shadows and the cold, many of us find the shorter days hard-going.

As we enter the Advent season we are reminded of the words at the beginning of John's Gospel, that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will never overcome it. The light remains, endlessly hopeful, and we can depend upon it. A first century philosopher once said, 'when I light a candle, I say to the darkness, 'I beg to differ''. Holding a light up to the shadows can feel like an act of defiance, it echoes speaking truth to power, it is a protest against despair and a reminder that peace is possible. The promise that the light of God in Jesus enters the world to bring peace, joy and wholeness, is at the heart of all our Advent expectation.

We enter the season of waiting expectantly, of getting ready for what is to come. My daughter is expecting a baby next year and we wait with her and her husband. We do so with joyful hope and we get ready even though we know pregnancy is sometimes a difficult journey. It is an active kind of waiting.

During Advent the weeks ahead take us on a journey of expectation. We meet the patriarchs and prophets, John the Baptist and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Each offers a challenge, some disturb and unsettle us, but as the weeks pass, we are reminded of the magnitude of the One who will be born amongst us. We travel with those who have already waited.

In the church we find ourselves in the position of trying to hold onto a season of preparation when so much of Christmas is out there being celebrated. During that excitement, and as we enjoy it too, it is our call to hold onto that watching and waiting. It is ours to wait, to wonder and to grow in our own faith journey because we know that we are not there just yet.

I invite you, this Advent to take part in this active waiting. To take time for stillness and for wonder, to inhabit once more this familiar

story and contemplate what it says to you just now. May we be alert to something new. May we ask what God is saying to us this year and how we can join in with what God is already doing.

Wishing you all a happy Advent waiting time...

This is a prayer written by Kate McIlhagga which sums it up for me:

*Christ our Advent hope,
bare brown trees,
etched dark across a winter sky,
leaves fallen, rustling,
ground hard and cold,
remind us to prepare for your coming;
remind us to prepare for the time
when the soles of your feet will touch the ground,
when you will become one of us
to be at one with us.*

*May we watch for the signs,
Listen for the messenger,
wait for the good news to slip into our world, our lives.*

*Christ our Advent hope, help us to clear the way for you, to clear
the clutter from our minds, to sift the silt from our hearts, to move
the boulders that prevent us meeting you.*

*May sorrow take flight, and your people sing a song of peace
and hope be born again.*

Amen.

Every blessing for the season,

Helen