

Sermon for Advent Sunday at Holy Trinity Geneva on 30 November 2025

Texts: Isaiah 2.1-5; Romans 13.11; Matthew 24.36-44

Advent Sunday – Preparing and Waiting

Today is Advent Sunday and we are now entering into one of the richest times in the Church's year. It's a season of contrasts as we are called to look forward and to look back; to hold together joy and judgement; to do all we can to get ready and at the same time to wait in stillness; a time of urgency and yet a time to wait.

Somehow we have to hold all these contrasts together if we are to enter the depth of Advent and glimpse the significance of what the coming of Christ at Christmas means for us and for the world. And I suggest that how we do this may be summed up in two simple words which nevertheless, hold the immense mystery of Advent. These words are *preparing* and *waiting*.

Today, we begin our Advent preparation by exploring these contrasts which we are being asked to hold during this holy season. We do this to prepare and equip ourselves for what lies ahead. It is as if we are about to journey into a strange land and we are looking at a map to help us visualise what lies ahead.

It's a strange map because one of the greatest contrasts in Advent is that of time. We are preparing to celebrate at Christmas, an event which happened over two thousand years ago. And to understand that event, we have to look back far before that date, to the times of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as the prophets, including Isaiah and Malachi who foretold the coming of the Messiah.

So we look back in Advent as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ on Christmas Day. But we are also looking forward right ahead in time when Jesus will come as judge for us and for the world – that final judgment.

This is why Advent as well as being a season of joy and hope as we anticipate the coming Messiah, is also one of solemnity and penitence. It is why we have the liturgical colour of purple which signifies penitence just as we do in Lent. For as we anticipate the coming of Christ as our judge, it leads us to reflect about the reality of our lives and the current state of the world in the light of God's love and God's justice.

As we look at our map of Advent, we also glimpse another great pair of contrasts of this land. These are on the one hand the urgent need to prepare during this season and on the other, the equally urgent call to wait attentively and patiently on God.

One of the closest analogies to help us understand this contrast of Advent between preparation and waiting is that of pregnancy as we await the birth of a child. It's a joy and a sign of hope for the future. At the same time, it challenges us as we think of the responsibility we are taking on to nurture a new life, making us think hard about our readiness to this.

We have to prepare both mentally for the birth of a child and also in practical ways, buying a cot and pram, nappies, and clothing, having medical checks and attending anti-natal classes. But a big part of pregnancy is also about waiting. And in the waiting, we become aware, little by little, of the new life growing inside us, beginning with an almost indiscernible flutter and gradually growing in size and vigour.

The child grows and we cannot rush it. Nor do we want to, for despite the physical weight and unwieldiness we face in the final stages, we know that it is essential that this new life growing within us is able to reach full term so that he or she can be born safely.

And as the child grows, we start building a relationship with it, even though we can only glimpse at this point, the reality which is to come. We start wondering what the child will look like, whom he or she will resemble, and what sort of character they will be.

As we wait, we become aware, again little by little, that our focus has shifted. Our attention is starting to move away from ourselves and our preoccupations to the one who is coming, who will shortly take centre stage.

In Advent we too need both to prepare and to wait for the birth of Christ. To prepare by prayer, studying the Bible and entering into our Advent liturgies so that we are mentally and spiritually alert to what God is saying to us at this time. As well as our regular and special services in Advent, you may find that our Advent Contemplative Prayer morning next Saturday will create rich and fruitful context to prepare. I also strongly recommend the Advent Book called 'The First Advent in Palestine' by Kelley Nikonde on which Mary Talbot is a leading an online discussion each Thursday lunchtime in Advent. Her book is a powerful engagement between the issues of power and oppression in the Holy Land at the time of Jesus and the issues facing the Palestinians today.

But we also need to make the conscious commitment in these next four weeks to wait on God. Waiting is not something which comes easily to most of us and indeed we often associate it with frustration and a waste of our precious time. But Advent waiting is a rich, fruitful experience when we can open ourselves to God, asking Him to come to us, at this time to prepare us for what the birth of Christ will mean for us now and for our world.

Advent points us too to the paradox that the tiny child whom Mary is carrying, who will be born and laid in the manger in Bethlehem, is God – the Lord of all that exists. He is coming as our Saviour. He is also coming as our judge.

We remember too as we look at the white candle at the centre of our Advent wreath that on Christmas Day, in just 25 days' time, we celebrate the joy and hope which will come with the birth of Christ. We do so in the faith that as we commemorate and celebrate this event which happened over two thousand years ago, the hope and joy which Christ brings will be a reality too for us and all people in all the confusion and darkness of our current age.

And the prophet Isaiah today speaks to us to look forward to a future when God's hope and promise for all His creation will be fulfilled. It's a vision which speaks directly to us, caught up, as we are, in a world which is embroiled in what feels like an endless cycle of destructive, bitter conflicts in which we human beings inflict terrible suffering both on each other and on the very created order itself.

The vision is that on one day all nations and all peoples will stream to God's holy mountain. There, He will teach us His ways and we will learn to walk in His paths. Advent is pointing us to that great day of hope when God will indeed show us how to lay down our weapons of war, our feuding and hatreds and instead learn to find our true humanity, by using skills and resources He has showered upon us, to build lasting reconciliation and peace. On that day, those heartfelt words of the Lord's Prayer, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done" will indeed be realised.

As we are led in Advent to look forward with hope and joyful expectation both to the birth of Christ and the day of the final coming of God's kingdom, we glimpse the love of God for us – that passionate love for us which will never let us go and will never give up on us however deeply we fail.

It's this passionate love of God which lies at the heart of the incarnation of Jesus. It is expressed powerfully in the words of the Welsh poet, R.S. Thomas in his poem called ;'The Coming' and it is with this poem that I would like to end today.

*And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look he said.
The son looked. Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows: a bright
Serpent, A river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.*

*On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. many People
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.*

Amen

Canon Daphne Green