

## ADVENT SUNDAY 2003

Nicky Ing - 30th November 2003

Jeremiah 33: 14-16, Psalm 25:1-10, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Luke 21: 25-36.

This Sunday each year the Church invites us to start on a journey.... The journey of the Liturgical Year. We mark this beginning with the season of Advent, which means 'arrival'. When we start the liturgical year, we are setting out to follow in the footsteps of Christ...in the course of the year, the whole of his life and teaching will pass before us...we will revisit all the mysteries of his time on earth: from his expectation (that is what Advent is all about) to his birth, his life, death, resurrection, ascension into heaven, and his sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost....so during the year we will relive his whole story...and for us, it needs to be new, and alive...not like playing an old tune, or an old video...the celebration of each feast brings back the event in its reality for us, not allowing it to grow cold or stale...and we are not just spectators in all this...but we are involved...God is not just a God of the past, but of the present and the future....so each time we hear the Christ story, it can become a deeper experience for us, and as we draw closer to the story and the person of Jesus we find that our own story becomes merged with his story, and our faith journey enables us to live our own lives more fully and more joyfully. So even though we may have made this journey before, this is another new beginning, and a God-given opportunity for each one of us.

So, Advent focuses our attention on the coming of Christ. The liturgical colour of purple is a symbol for us of the Kingship of Christ...and also reminds us of the need for penitence, for sorrow...a need for a new beginning . We live **between** the two comings of Christ...his first coming in humility and weakness, in Bethlehem, and his second coming in majesty and power at the end of time.

In the first reading we heard today, the prophet Jeremiah assures the people that God will send the promised one, the Messiah...Jeremiah offered a message of hope to a group of people who were feeling that there was no hope....they were tired and discouraged.....maybe some of us are feeling that way today. And then in the second reading, the apostle Paul offers a prayer for the Thessalonian Christians. He has heard of their concerns for some of their congregation who had died, and who, they believed, would not be included in the glory of the Lord's second coming. In those days, Christians believed that Jesus Christ would be returning very soon, and this was a source of confidence and hope to a group of people who were ostracised and even killed for their beliefs. Paul prays that he and others will find their way to them and, most importantly, that God will increase their love to each other and to all people...for it is in this gift of love that their hearts will be made holy before God at God's coming. This prayer, written in humility, emphasises the importance of love for one another as a way through which our hearts are established in holiness, and so it is a prayer of hope, in a time of hopelessness.

Luke's Gospel encourages us, during this Advent season, to live as people of hope....as people who expect God to be near, and to trust that God is doing something new in our lives. I spoke just now about us being on a journey....It is a good opportunity, at this time, to reflect on our journey of the past year...to take stock of

our challenges, our failures, and our accomplishments, as well as how we have responded to God during this past year....how was our faith expressed, not only in worship but in our actions, our dealings with others? Did we fall short, and is there anything we can do about it? It is good to reflect on the role that we allow God to play in our lives.....

The language in the readings today reminds us that 'God is near'.....do we find that a reassuring promise? Luke's Gospel tells us of a time when nations are perplexed at the signs in nature and its awesome power when people faint 'with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken'.....and the reading then tells of the sprouting of the fig-leaf as a sign of the new season of growth and life, at the end of a long drought, or a long winter....

Despair and hope often seem to go hand-in hand. It is the promise of the Gospel, that in this life and the many events which happen around us, and which often evoke despair in us, there is the promise of hope in a bright future..... because **faith** in Jesus Christ is the seed of new life from which hope can spring and flourish. The good news for us is that, even though we too live in anxious times, Jesus tells us that we can stand and lift our heads high, because our redemption is near.....our redemption, the one who saves us, is Jesus Christ, God's son, and he is near to us....when things look most frightening, when we are most afraid, that is when our lives are closest to God, and it is at times like this that God can do a new thing in us. So this Gospel encourages us, during this Advent season, to live as people who **expect** God to be near, people who expect and **trust** in Christ's coming. It means that we can even begin to see the worries and fears in our lives as possibilities. We can look at the people and situations that trouble us as **signs** of God's near and living presence, as opportunities for God to work in us. If we reach out into these difficult situations and don't run from them, we will find that we can reach God. It means that even painful relationships can be made whole (yes, we all have them...) they can be made whole not by our will or our power, but by God, who works through us if we allow Him to do so. I believe God wants us to know that he longs to transform and make new even the most impossible situations in our lives. Let us look and see Christ Jesus in those people who have caused us heartache and pain...and ask for the strength to see others in a new way, as we start this Advent journey today....so that, in the words of Paul to the Thessalonians, 'may the Lord make us increase and abound in love for one another and for all.....and may he so strengthen our hearts in holiness that we may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints....' We ask these things today in hope, and in faith, in the name of Jesus Christ, who was, and is, and is yet to be. **AMEN**