

## Advent by Rev Jane Kraft

### A sermon given at St Michael's, Sandhurst on Advent Sunday 2017

Almighty God,  
 give us grace to cast away the works of darkness  
 and to put on the armour of light,  
 now in the time of this mortal life,  
 in which your Son Jesus Christ  
 came to us in great humility;  
 that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty  
 to judge the living and the dead,  
 we may rise to the life immortal;

Words of the collect for Advent Sunday which the Book of Common Prayer rubric directs should be repeated every day after the other collects in Advent until Christmas Eve. And Common worship instructs that it may be used as the Post communion prayer throughout the Advent season. It is to be constant reminder for these next four weeks of the particular focus of this time of the churches year.

As the collect so eloquently states this period of Advent is a double preparation. Centuries ago Cyril of Jerusalem said "We do not preach only one coming of Christ but a second as well, much more glorious than the first."

We remember Jesus first came as a baby in humility born in a stable at Bethlehem. Christ's coming at the last will be as King in glory and majesty.

As we give thanks for the humility and weakness which brought our salvation we wait in hope for his coming again in glory and majesty.

We know when we are going to celebrate and give thanks for the incarnation. All around us there are indications that Christmas is coming. We also know what preparations we have got to make. Wrapping presents writing cards cooking food and buying drinks.

What we don't know is when his Second Coming will be, and I wonder how much time we devote to considering the preparations we need to make for that moment?

Down the ages there has been much speculation about when the end of the world would come. The early Christians thought Jesus would return in their life time. Hippolytus of Rome and Irenaeus both predicted that Christ would return in the year 500 AD. An ancient Mayan prophecy indicated that the world would end on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2012. Some of you are old enough to remember the men who walked around with sandwich boards stating the end is nigh. And prepare to meet thy doom. Well we're still here!

Jesus said that we do not know the time or the hour.

Yet although we do not know when, we have the promise that Christ will return and we are called to look and to listen for his coming with active anticipation. That means that we need to guard against apathy and complacency, and beware lest we become so preoccupied with the familiar and comfortable that we cease to be attentive to fresh challenges and new activities.

The church is called to be faithful and vigilant as we wait and pray for the coming of the Kingdom.

As the story of the Incarnation is told again and we look back to that moment in history when the Word, which had existed for all time, became flesh and dwelt among us, we also look forward to that moment when he will return in Glory.

There is a constant expectation in the scriptures of the judgement and the deliverance, which is God's plan for his world. We have a deadline for getting ready for Christmas by the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> December we will expect to be ready.

We are promised that Christ will come again that is a sure hope. What we don't know is the moment when our preparations for that time should be complete. As Christians we live in the shadow of eternity, we are already part of the kingdom and our lives should reflect this.

The Bishop of Oxford has recently issued an invitation for everyone to explore the Beatitudes as set out in the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Matthew's gospel. He says

"For me the Beatitudes have 8 beautiful qualities, but 8 is quite a lot to remember so I've been keen to capture what they mean in three words: contemplative, compassionate and courageous. I want people to be asking what do these words teach us and tell us about Jesus, what do they tell us about being human in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and what do they tell us about what kind of church we're called to be."

So, is the time of Advent directing us to live our whole lives remembering the past and looking to the future?

In a way it is, for we, in the company with all God's people are on a journey and every journey is made up of where we have come from and the destination to which we are heading. But between the past and the future is the present. The prophesied Saviour who, in a moment of history, came as a helpless baby and who announced that He would come again, also promises to be with us in the present.

Neville Ward said "The will of God is always something we are to do now, in this present moment, because the present moment is the only moment in which we can do anything."

And in this present moment we are called to contemplate the things of God and be open hearted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit; we are called to be tender hearted and we are called to be whole hearted as we live our Christian lives to the Glory of God in this broken and divided world.

In this Advent season may we grow to be more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous as we pray Thy Kingdom come.