

## Advent Sunday St Michaels 30 11 25

Be ready, the last words of this morning's Gospel commands us. Be ready!

But for what?

The word Advent means coming

And just 4 weeks before Christmas, we, as a church, start our preparations to be ready to celebrate the moment, over 2000 years ago when Jesus first came as a baby, born in a stable at Bethlehem.

I don't know if you have ever been to the Christmas markets on the continent but visiting them is a unique and special experience. My late husband and I visited Vienna one year during the first week of Advent, almost every shop and hotel lobby had an advent wreath with the candles for each Sunday of the season. Over the years, this custom has become more common in this country, and many churches light the advent candles as part of the liturgy each Sunday in the Advent season. And we recall God's steadfast love for his people and

our common heritage with the Jewish people and their pilgrimage of faith down the ages beginning with The Patriarchs –

We remember Abraham our father in faith: in whom all nations are blessed

Moses - who lead the Children of Israel from slavery to freedom.

David - the ancestor in whose city Jesus was born.

The second Sunday we think about the prophets who told of the coming of the Messiah and that he would be called Prince of Peace.

The last of the prophets to tell of the coming Messiah was John the Baptist. John came after a long silence, several hundred years had passed since the last prophets had spoken in Israel. He marks the boundary between the Old and New Testaments. He was to be the last great pre-messianic prophet.

There is something of an air of imminent expectancy in the ministry of John. John is the one who was to clear a path in people's hearts, so they would be receptive and expectant when the Lord appeared.

St. Augustine said, "John is both a representative of the past and a herald of the new".

He came proclaiming a Baptism of repentance and heralded Jesus as the Lamb of God.

It was John who Baptised Jesus in the Jordan when the voice came from heaven "this is my beloved son".

And so, with the last Sunday of the four we draw nearer to the incarnation as we think about Mary. The God bearer - Mary was filled with Joy when the angel Gabriel told her that she was to be the mother of God's son. - As Mary rejoiced at the birth of Jesus, so we celebrate the Joy we find in knowing Jesus for ourselves.

Some churches think of different theme each week and the four candles of the Advent wreath have– A Candle for HOPE as we look forward to the coming of Jesus.

The Light shining in a dark place

A Candle for PEACE as we look for the coming of the Prince of Peace

A Candle of LOVE as we remember the love which brought about our redemption and restoration

And a Candle of JOY as we sing with Mary my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

Some Advent wreaths have a fifth candle, a white one which is lit on Christmas Day. A reminder that Jesus said I am the light of the world. John at the beginning of his Gospel reminds us that “In the beginning was the Word... All things came into being through him ... and what has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it”

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.”

At Christmas we remember Jesus first came as a baby in humility born in a stable at Bethlehem.

In these next four weeks we will be looking forward and getting ready to celebrate the incarnation, but we should also be using this time to prepare our hearts and minds for Christ’s return as King in glory and majesty.

As Christians we have the promise that Christ will return in Glory. We are called to look and to listen for this coming with active anticipation. We must be watchful for the enemy and guard against apathy and complacency.

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 have devoted to considering the preparations we need to make for that moment?

The season of Advent calls us to be faithful and vigilant, so we are ready.



The call of Advent  
is a call to live wide awake  
so that we can be alert  
to God working in us  
and in our world  
to bring about the Kingdom.



Awareness is another  
way of talking  
about being awake.



Work today to be aware of the  
needs of people around you

*Philip Berrigan and Elizabeth McAlister*



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