

December 2025

Bishop Malcolm writes...

Advent Hope - Light in the darkness

As I write it is not even December yet but by 4pm it is already nearly dark! All the darker as the weather gets wilder and wetter, with the promise of the white stuff coming any day now. At least in the dark the snow will bring its own unique reflective brightness.



Whilst officially still autumn until December 21st – by which time the last leaf in Derbyshire will surely have fallen - these rapidly shortening days and lengthening hours of night shroud us in this season with foreboding, as much as in anticipation. These are the days we learn to appreciate the light, and begin to pine for more of it long before Spring comes.

Our regular seasonal gathering gloom is more than matched by the dark shadows which prevail in our nation and in the wider world. Like buses it seems existential crises all arrive at once – poverty and inequality, destructive weather events caused by climate change, and persistent conflict erupting in devastating wars. Dark days indeed for a world that had come to believe in progress. And most especially, for the poor, the vulnerable, and the dispossessed.

At our churches in Advent, Sunday by Sunday we hear the words of the Hebrew prophets. They were realistic about darkness, about human failure and sin, and its impact on the whole of society, especially on those who were most vulnerable – in that time the orphan, the widow, the alien or stranger. A society that failed to live up to God's call to justice, integrity, and compassion was doomed to fail. Judgment was inevitable where people turned their back on the responsibilities of being human.

In the days of the Hebrew prophets there were those who thought you could away with thinking of your own nation only. But this was not the whole picture. In the scriptures and most especially in the New Testament we see a different perspective emerging – the recognition of the whole human family as created by God, invited to share in the 'fullness of life' which is Jesus' gift to us.

The internationalism of the Gospel is a core value of the Christian faith. Contemporary versions of Christianity that revert to the attitudes of the Crusades are perversions of our faith. As the established church in England we have to be careful not to misrepresent Jesus, the Saviour not just of **our** people, but of **all** people. Why? Because 'God so loved **the world**.' Not just me and the people who agree with me. Not just my people, not just my ethnic group or my country, but the whole wide world. This includes everyone:

The orphaned child taken care of within a family fleeing the fighting in Sudan. The elderly woman who cannot understand why she has to leave her pacific island home, soon to be devoured by the rising sea. The young man fleeing persecution for his faith. All these, along with our friends and neighbours here at home and at school and at work, are part of that same human family into which Jesus was born, and for which Christ died and rose again. And yet the journey is so hard, and the way is so dark, for many today.

John Donne, 16th Century poet and Dean of St Paul's in London, published a poem expressing the darkness of his grief at the loss of his beloved. On St Lucy's day, 13th December, then believed to be the shortest day, he wrote of his experience of loss: 'It is the year's midnight, the Dies Lucies'. Not from 13th December, but from the end of the month, the days do begin to turn brighter and longer again. Donne in his darkness did not despair absolutely – he knew the light would return. So even in the thick darkness of December we detect the seeds of hope. As someone reminded me recently, during the winter there is life and growth – we just don't see it because it is going on underground.

This theme of light and darkness stays with us throughout Advent, and then on Christmas morning the Gospel hope resounds: with Jesus coming 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.'

May the light of Christ shine ever more brightly in our world and in our time, and in each one of us. We do well to learn from the Jewish Rabbi who asked his students: "how do we know when the night has ended and the day has begun?"

One bright student offered an answer: "When I look out at the fields and I can distinguish between my field and the field of my neighbour's, that's when the night has ended and day has begun."

The rabbi shook his head. That was not it.

Another student answered: "When I look from the fields and I see a house and I can tell that it's my house and not my neighbour's house, that's when the night has ended and the day has begun."

No – that wasn't it either.

A third student suggested: "When I can distinguish the animals in the yard – and I can tell a cow from a horse – that's when the night has ended."

Disappointed in his students, the Rabbi replied, and went on to say:

"When you look into the eyes of the person who is beside you and you can see that that person is your brother or your sister, when you can recognize that person as a friend, then, finally, the night has ended and the day has begun."

May God open our eyes to the true light that has come into the world, and make us able to live in this light always.

'The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world' John 1.9. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "+ Malcolm Macnaughton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt Revd Malcolm Macnaughton
The Bishop of Repton