Advent 2026

Advent is the time in the Church's calendar that best reflects the lives of Christians.

It is easy to get lost or caught up in the preparations for Christmas during December. We may be receiving invitations, buying presents or enjoying one of the numerous luxury Advent Calendars that are available nowadays. All of these activities have meant that in the secular world the boundaries between Advent and the celebration of Christ's birth have become blurred, and the real themes and focus of Advent have become lost.

For the church, Advent is not necessarily just a period of practical preparation for celebrating Christmas and the subsequent feasts of the incarnation season. Rather, Advent is a period of expectation, hope and joy as we prepare for the second coming of Christ at the end of time.

Unlike Lent, Advent is not primarily a season of penitence, but one of reflection and spiritual preparation. The readings and themes are often eschatological, or concerned with the end of time, and focus our hearts and minds on looking out for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Advent best reflects the reality of the Christian life because it is an "in-between time". As Christians we live in the time after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and in a period of longing and awaiting Christ's second coming. At Advent this "in-between" living is reflect by the readings, the liturgy and the hymns of the church, and these eschatological themes are often picked up by those who preach on the four Sundays of advent.

The Four Last Things



Details of the Last Judgement by Viktor Vasnetsov

This Advent the sermons at our 9:30am & 11am Parish Eucharist will be reflecting on four traditional themes, The Four Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. These four themes or topics have traditionally been the focus of preaching over Advent through the history of the Church. Having faced persecution and oppression from the political powers at the time, early Christians and the early Church developed an imminent understanding of eschatology, they believed Jesus would return in their lifetime, and they were deeply concerned with what would happen at the end of time.

Traditionally the Four Last Things are to do with the journey of the soul after death.

Theologically speaking *Death* is the separation of the soul from the body; it is something that we will all experience. Whilst we are alive death, is something we learn to live with, not least the death of those we love.

However, through Christ's death and resurrection we know that death is not the end, because Christ, as in all things, has gone before us and

prepared a way for us to eternal life. Death should perhaps no longer be something taboo but talked about and reflected on, not in a morbid way but with hope. It is only through death that we can be raised to share in the glory of heaven.

Judgement evokes within us the images that are depicted in many churches, or parables like the sheep and the goats. In the Roman Catholic tradition and Anglo-Catholic tradition of the Church of England there are understood to be two judgements: the Particular and the Last Judgement.

The Particular Judgement is best demonstrated by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus at the gate. The rich man's life is laid bare before him after his death and judged on his ability to love. The Particular or Immediate judgement is not meant to scare us but is meant to awaken in us a love and responsibility for our neighbour and encourage us to use our gifts to the glory of God.

At the Last Judgement, as the Creed says, Jesus will come to judge the living (quick) and the dead. The last judgement will mark the end of time and the coming of the Kingdom of God in its fullness; the dead shall be raised, their bodies transformed and glorified.

When it comes to talking or thinking about *Heaven* we can also be lured into brining to mind images of clouds and angels with wings and halos, rather than a deeper understanding of the divine dwelling place. Heaven is that place where our vision or awareness of the presence of God is uninterrupted by the changes and chances of life. It is perhaps most beautifully articulated in a prayer by John Donne:

> Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening
> into the house and gate of heaven,
> to enter that gate and dwell in that house,
> where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling,
> but one equal light;
> no noise nor silence, but one equal music;
> no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;
> no ends or beginnings, but one equal eternity;

in the habitations of your glory and dominion,
world without end.

Hell, like judgement also evokes images of fire, devils, demons and torment - the outer darkness as it is also referred to in the Gospel. Curiously hell is the last sermon preached in the weeks of Advent, making it closest the to the celebration of Christmas.

One might expect hell to have been dealt with in the third week, when the readings tell us about the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist, rather than in the fourth week of Advent when we hear about the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It is no coincidence that we hear the annunciation Gospels and a sermon about hell. The incarnation, which we celebrate at Christmas is the coming to earth of God in the form of the infant Jesus; the coming to earth of the one who puts evil and satan to flight. This is a theme picked up in many Advent and Christmas carols, such as 16th Century hymn Gabriels Message does away:

Gabriel's message does away
Satan's curse and Satan's sway,
out of darkness brings our Day:

So, behold,
All the gates of heaven unfold.

The Four Last Things are big topics and at first at least three of them don't necessarily evoke feelings of hope and joy. However, these big topics are often things we think about, as does the world outside the church door. The Bible and the Church has much to say about them. We hope that this series of sermons over the four Sundays of Advent will prompt discussion, reflection and an opportunity to think and pray about bigger issues that we may not allow ourselves the time to think about at other times of the Christians calendar.