

Advent: Unwrapping the season. (Batteries are always included...)



I love the purple of Advent. It is the colour of royalty, preparing us for the majesty of God to break through, promising something rich, deep and glorious. It's the colour of change, and promise – of the move from day to dusk, as darkness brings an end to daily activity, and calls us to wait and watch for the stars.

It unites us in a strange way with those Magi, whose arrival we will celebrate at Epiphany – who now, at this point in our story, have been standing gazing into the mystery of the night, longing for a sign, a presence.... and have seen a star, and are beginning a long, long journey.

It does take a long, long journey sometimes, if we are to truly arrive somewhere new. And it does take gazing into the dark and the mystery if we are truly to receive the gifts we cannot imagine.

Purple – the colour of desire and longing.

If you look at all the bustle of December; the present purchasing, the twinkling lights, and the slushy films ... there is a yearning there. A nameless yearning for 'emptiness' and 'want' to be filled. For light in darkness, for community and family and love, for happy endings and possibilities. For satisfaction. For the poor and downtrodden to be lifted up. For re-discovery of roots, and connection between peoples.

What do we truly yearn for? The ancient prayers of Advent speak of a yearning for Wisdom, Leadership or Guidance, Rootedness and Connection, Meaning, Closure or Possibility... of light in darkness. ... and they give that nameless yearning a Name ... Emmanuel, God with us.

The great Advent prayer is an Aramaic prayer of yearning...

Maranatha!

It means ***Come Lord, Come***

The thing people often forget at Christmas

is the batteries.

Just as the presents are opened... the cry goes up... have we got any AAAs?

Well, the Right Reverend Jeffrey Johns claims that Advent should be spelt out slowly, with three As.

The first A of the AAA of Advent, he says, is

Anticipation.

Let us not hurry through to Christmas. *Haste is waste*, he says; let us take time to think about what we really desire, and open our hearts to prepare for it. Where do we find our closure, our possibility, our hope, our guidance and our grounding....? And what does that look like for us, in our lives and communities?

Let us look deep, into the Cradle, and then deeper yet still.

For the coming of the Lord we wait for at Advent, is not just at Christmas, but at the end of all time. We wait for his coming in final meaning, in final justice, in final healing, in final redemption. We wait for what we prepare to meet in the Cradle, joining himself to our human longings, to come again, fulfilling our human longings through his Divine Majesty.

Maranatha! Come, Lord, come.

There's an impatience in the world these days around Christmas. It starts earlier every year – before Halloween this year, Christmas items were tiptoeing into the shops.

It almost feels like the cry of a little child, tired of the journey, and willing to trade even the joys of the destination for a temporary halt to the waiting *Are we nearly there yet?*

It's the cry of a world calling out for peace, healing and hope... for that first, and that final, coming of the Lord. For hope for the journey, and – truly - for the reckoning and blessing of God's gathering of the world into love and justice.

Are we nearly there yet?

In our reading today, S. Paul tells us

you know what time it is. Wake up!

Which brings us to the second of Fr. Jeffrey's AAA of Advent.

Attention – wake up! Be Alert.

One of the great themes of Advent is watchfulness. How often do we sleep through our lives? Miss the burning bush, the star in the sky, the baby in the cradle?

I remember last week, a very stressy morning. I was rushing. And Hannah's little old car needed the ice scraping off it, and I went to help... and as I scraped the ice from her tinted rear windows ... I suddenly saw reflected in them a glorious burning orange dawn.

I could feel God smiling at me. *Did you not notice?* he was asking... *turn around....open your eyes! Wake up, to my love, blessing and wonder. Breathe and all will be well.*

The great advent prayer Marantha means *Come, Lord come.*

But also '*our Lord has come*'.

It is a prayer of yearning, and also a prayer of Faith.

Advent says the Lord that has come, is now, and will come anew. Advent is a time-weaver, allowing the future to bless and renew the present and the past.

History is not linear. All that has blessed can be lifted up and woven into love, and all that has been so broken will yet be redeemed.

Biography is not destiny, says Advent.

Our destiny is to be claimed by the Lord.

I am with you, he says, and I will draw all people unto myself.

Jesus will come. Always. Whenever we reach out, we find him there, reaching back.

In our gospel today Jesus describes a world where the ordinary everyday continues.. and suddenly, unpredictably, disaster strikes... as it does, doesn't it, from time to time. There in the ordinary. The health diagnosis comes, climate change, fuel costs, lost job, bereavement, the broken relationship, the chaos of life.

When that happens, says Jesus in our gospel reading,.. ... you are not alone reach out to what is reaching to you. For just as the floods come, so comes the Son of Man. Just as the world can sweep us away, so God shows us how to build an ark.

And that takes us to the third of Fr Jeffrey's AAA of Advent.

Application – how we wear the truth and the grace we find.

S. Paul calls it *the armour of light*. clothes for protection, clothes for battle.

Cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

Be open to the invitation of Advent, delve deep within all the lights and tinsel, the haste and the bustle, and find the gifts of mystery and encounter. Be bold to desire, and attentive to God's response to our desires.

Let us meet the nameless yearning of the world for 'emptiness' and 'want' to be filled.

With a Name. And our unashamed longing.

And build a community of love and hope. Where we learn to be open to ever-coming, ever-present God, and to share him with others in the storms of life, opening the ark doors, for all to come in.

Dag Hammarskjöld, former secretary general of the United Nations, famously wrote in his journal – “For all that has been – thanks! To all that will be – yes!”.

Advent calls us to see God in all, and say yes to the total reality.

... To something that will not run out of steam, or battery power and fizzle out after a few hours, or days. But a gift of life-giving power that builds up, layer and layer, year and year, deeper and deeper.

It does take a long, long journey sometimes, if we are to truly arrive somewhere new. And it does take gazing into the dark and the mystery if we are truly to receive the gifts we cannot imagine.

In our weariness we cry *Where are the AAAs?*

The Advent gift.... Anticipation, Attention, and Application...

Each leading us to the life-giving loving discovery of the Lord who comes.

With Faith, the batteries are always included.