

## Advent Musings 2020

### Advent 1 - Waiting in the Darkness

We are not good at waiting these days. Some just live for the moment and we have all become used to instant communication; we want immediate answers and action, becoming frustrated with having to wait. Yet in a curious way these strange times in which we find ourselves have presented us with more time than we are used to, and forced us to wait for the situation to be resolved, for we can do nothing else.

A story is told about one of the Desert Fathers of the Early Church, who upon receiving some visitors to his remote abode showed them to a cave, made sure they had everything they needed, and told them to *wait*. He left them there for two years before coming back to see what it was they wanted! This really is waiting; and so is Advent - a time for waiting and preparing to once again celebrate the coming of Jesus into this world and into our lives.

So we shall spend the next 4 weeks doing just that! Each Sunday we shall consider scripture readings for the season and explore the theme of *waiting*:

*Waiting in the Darkness*

*Waiting in the Wilderness*

*Waiting for the Messiah*

*Waiting on the Lord*

I do hope you will come on this Advent journey in some way. For like the people who lived at the time of the prophet Isaiah, we are aware that there is much darkness and challenged to wait patiently for the light that will surely come. (*Isaiah 9:2*)

*Wait for the LORD:*

*be strong, take heart! \**

\* Taizé Community

### Advent 2 - Waiting in the Wilderness

Back in the 1990's Lesley & I visited the Yorkshire Dales for a few days walking and stayed in the village of Reeth. We were quite bemused by an American couple who asked us where the ATM was! For I remember we had taken the precaution of visiting a Lloyds Bank Cashpoint in Richmond whilst we were still 'in civilisation'. Indeed, one of the attractions of such remote locations, and serious hillwalking, is the chance to get away from busy places and enjoy a 'wilderness experience', appreciating the beauty of what we have around us.

In the early centuries AD there was a significant movement of Christians withdrawing from 'the world' and seeking a life of radical renunciation, simplicity and prayer. My favourite is *Simeon Stylites* who lived for 37 years on a small platform atop a pillar of about 15 metres tall near ancient Aleppo. For sustenance small boys from the nearby village would climb up the pillar and pass him parcels of flat bread and goats' milk. He may also have pulled up food in buckets via a pulley. His aim was to devote his whole being to prayer, assuming different positions through the day and night. Without the distractions of other domestic arrangements, he was able to more fully appreciate the presence of God.

This Christmas is going to be different without many of the trappings and ways of gathering that we have come to expect, in our family circles as well as in church. Yet curiously this may allow us to appreciate the message of Christmas in a deeper way. About the same time as Lesley and I were walking in the Dales, the songwriter Matt Redman wrote these words:

*When the music fades,  
all is stripped away  
and I simply come...  
It's all about You, Jesus.*

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Just a thought as we wait...

### **Advent 3 - Waiting for the Messiah**

When I was training for ministry in Oxford I got quite used to the Park and Ride system. There was plenty of car parking space at several sites all served by regular buses into the city centre, and rarely a long wait. It was not always thus... In my younger days I can remember waiting for buses that never arrived and there was no way of telling back then. These days, of course, buses are tracked and we have smart displays at bus stops telling us where they are and when they will arrive, or we might have an app on our mobile phone so we know how long we might have to wait.

Well an even longer long time back, some 750 years before the birth of Jesus, the people of God were awaiting a Messiah - one anointed by God to lead and save them. They continued to wait. Then as the Old Testament scriptures were completed, the prophet Malachi still reminded them to wait, for the Messiah *was* coming.

There is a lovely passage in Luke chapter 2 when two devout older people, Simeon and Anna, were waiting for the Messiah and both recognised his coming in the infant Jesus, and they were overjoyed. Yet Jesus also spoke of his coming again, and this moment has not yet arrived.

Advent is a time when we look back and identify with those who waited for the Messiah; and we also look forward and are reminded to await the glorious day when Jesus the Messiah will return to claim his kingdom. But without a tracking app, we just have to wait. **Amen. Come Lord Jesus!** (Revelation 22:20)

#### **Advent 4 - Waiting on the Lord**

It seemed God was both silent and invisible from the moment the last words of Old Testament scripture were spoken by the prophet Malachi. Then, about 450 years later, something stirred. There were angels and words from God and a young virgin said yes, '*let it be according to your word*'. (Luke 1:38)

So began the familiar narrative that ends with an expectant mother, her husband and a stable – the nativity scene we see depicted a thousand ways each Christmas. This year we have been able to install our silhouette nativity scene at the front of the Memorial Gardens where it has been much admired. Though we hit a snag with the lighting... the illumination for the plane tree is so powerful that in the dark it can be difficult to see the figures.

However, maybe this darkened scene helped to *illuminate* a profound truth, for as someone said to me 'it was as though God was invisible yet really there all along'... Perhaps this was as true of those long years between Malachi and the time of Jesus as it is today?

May we know that God is with us in our waiting.

**Kevin**