

## Time to Reflect Advent 2020

The holy Season of Advent signals for us the beginning of a new year in the Church.

I wonder whether you have ever noticed the correlation between the last weeks of the Church's Year – which correspond to the month of November: themes of Remembrance of the Dead and then the End of Time with both promise and warning, and the beginning of the Season of Advent: with quite similar themes of the End of Time, promise and warning!

Of course, we probably try a bit too hard to note the characteristics of seasons of the Church's Year in a way that sets them apart from the whole: as though Christmas is the only time we contemplate the Incarnation (God becoming human), Easter the only time we think about the Paschal Mystery (the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ). Whereas, the mystery of God with us and the Saving Death and Resurrection of Christ are themes that form part of our faith every single day: We recall the actions of the Last Supper at Christmas and we speak about 'the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ' throughout the year.

Advent, then, is a season of Joyful Hope. True, both in terms of spanning the month of December and with Christmas as the end of it, there is a clear sense of direction that Christmas is our goal during December. However, there is a richness to Advent that actually sees it through the prism of two aspects of the Mystery of Faith:

**Advent I (First Sunday of Advent to 16<sup>th</sup> December)** looks forward to the Second Coming of Christ, in glory, at the End of time.

**Advent II (17<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> December)** looks forward to the First Coming of Christ, as a child at Bethlehem.

If you're not confused yet, there's still plenty of chance!

So, we're talking about the beginning of the Church's Year and the End of time.

The Second Coming of Christ is far more difficult to grasp than the 'Christmas Nativity Story', yet by following one without the other, our faith can become somewhat one-dimensional. We could even say that by holding on to the Bethlehem Story (Advent II) but not engaging with our final destiny (Advent I), we can almost as adults remain, from the point of view of faith, at the level of children. Nothing wrong with the faith level of the child, but shouldn't adults develop their faith throughout their life?

This Advent, think about some of the characters that we find in Scripture during this relatively short Church season, which can sometimes be overtaken by Christmas before it even begins: The Prophet Isaiah, John the Baptist, Zechariah, Mary and Joseph. Why not consider choosing one of these holy men or women and asking them to accompany you through Advent, and noting whenever you hear them mentioned. They all lived in God's presence, lived the human

struggle and helped humanity to welcome the Saviour of the World. They made him known and do so still.

As we begin the new Church Year and the Gospel of St Mark, you might wish to engage in the reading of St Mark's Gospel – known to be the shortest of the Gospels. Perhaps it could be your reading each day during Advent which will also serve as preparation when we begin to read week by week from the Gospel of St Mark when Ordinary Time resumes in January.

One final tip: Remember that the well-known Advent hymn *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* is a hymn most associated with the last days of Advent. In the Divine Office (Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church) from 17<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> December – Advent II – and in the Gospel Acclamations for those days leading up to Christmas, we hear what are known as the 'O Antiphons' which call upon Christ by ancient titles:

17<sup>th</sup> December – O Wisdom

18<sup>th</sup> December – O Adonai (Lord)

19<sup>th</sup> December - O Root of Jesse

20<sup>th</sup> December - O Key of David

21<sup>st</sup> December – O Dawn of the East / Dayspring

22<sup>nd</sup> December – O King of the Gentiles

23<sup>rd</sup> December – O Emmanuel / God with us