

ADVENT

Approaching the Dawn as Pilgrims of Hope



Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.
Indeed, the Lord is near.
(Phil 4:4-5)



Pathways
to the Future

“Scripture establishes us in goodness and reminds us who we truly are: children of God, saved and beloved... Sacred Scripture releases a paralysed faith and makes us savour anew the Christian life for what it truly is: a love story with the Lord.”

Pope Francis Word of God Sunday, 2024

Welcome to our parish programme for Advent. Together we will gather to pray, share and reflect on the Sunday gospel readings during the 4 weeks of Advent.

Advent is a holy season which the Church has given to us so that we can make appropriate preparations for the celebration of Christmas. It is a time when we are reminded that we are pilgrims on a journey, a journey of hope towards the dawn, towards the light of Christ come in to the world. It is a beautiful time because it is full of joyful expectation and an anticipation of what is to come.

This Advent also marks a time of preparation for the beginning of the Jubilee year which will begin on Christmas Eve 2024, when the Holy Father, Pope Francis, opens the Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica. We are invited to reflect on our call as pilgrims of hope and to allow the Holy Spirit to awaken and stir within us a renewed appreciation of the gift of our faith and a reminder of our call to spread the message of peace and joy throughout the earth.

We also know that Advent clashes with the frantic secular activity which runs concurrently with the holy season and for many people contemplation of what we are about to celebrate can take second place in our list of priorities. This is a sad fact as it is easy to become overcome with the distractions and not more in tune with what is often referred to as, "the real meaning of Christmas". A phrase which has sadly become a euphemism.

We invite you to take up this opportunity to make some space this Advent so that you come to a greater awareness of the promises of Christ which were first made manifest through his long anticipated birth. Through shared and individual study, we hope that you will grow in the love and knowledge of God's love and all that he has done for us and all he continually wants to do for us.

We wish you every blessing this Advent.



The Jubilee Prayer

As part of our preparations for the Jubilee Year, we are invited by Pope Francis to say the following prayer.

Father in heaven,
may the faith you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of charity enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.

May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole
cosmos
in the sure expectation
of a new heaven and a new earth,
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.

May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.

To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever.

Amen

His Holiness, Pope Francis.

Gospel Passages for the 4 Sundays of Advent
YEAR C - The Year of Luke

Sunday 1st December

1st Sunday of Advent

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

That day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap.

Sunday 8th December

2nd Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:1-6

The Call of John the Baptist

Sunday 15th December

3rd Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:10-18

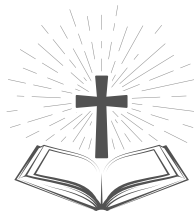
Someone is coming who will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and Fire.

Sunday 22nd December

4th Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-45

Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?



Foreword: Week 1

Jesus gives us a stark warning that we need to be alert and ready for his return. Through human history there has always been great speculation about, “The Second Coming”, or the end of the world. We are in the world but are advised to not be part of it. We are to live our lives as if we were to meet Jesus at any time. This could be at the end of the world or the end of our lives. Jesus puts before us a menacing and even horrific scene when he talks of such chaos and upheaval in all of nature that will cause some to die of fear. Such scenes have been played out on film and TV screens, but although we can find them scary and upsetting, we seldom move on to the possibility that they may actually happen. It seems that Jesus is telling us that they really could. However, we don’t know when.

This may sound daunting, but we are simply being called to discipleship. If we live as a witness to Christ every day of our lives his return will be a cause for rejoicing rather than fear. We may be aware of our failings or sinfulness, but we will also be aware of a loving, merciful God. We are asked to pray all the time. This does not necessarily mean that we are to spend all our time on our knees, rather that we bring God into every aspect of our lives.

As Christians we are called to holiness. Again, many people find this daunting but perhaps Jesus is asking us to rise to what could perhaps be better defined as a challenge. Living the Christian life in today’s world will present us with challenges every day and in many diverse ways. It is a life of love and service and although we may fail at times, with perseverance, determination and faith we will also succeed. God’s grace will inevitably bear fruit in us, and part of that success will be the ability to resist or deal with the coarseness, debauchery, drunkenness, and cares of life and stand before the Lord with confidence when are called to do so.

First Week of Advent



The Light of the World - By William Holman Hunt (1851-1852)

First Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we begin our journey this Advent, we ask that our time together in prayer and reflection will help us to prepare to receive the child Jesus into our hearts this Christmas. May we be attentive to the words of Jesus to be watchful, to keep alert and to recognise His presence in our lives. Amen.

Sunday Gospel Luke 21:25-28,34-36

‘That day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap.’

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.

‘Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.’ (JB)

Foreword: Week 2

It has to be admitted that we now live in a secular world, an ongoing trend with no real sign of abating any time soon. In parish conversations we often refer back to the “Good Old Days,” of filled churches, predominant Christian attitudes and ethos and of course Catholic Ireland, “the land of saints and scholars”. Patterns and trends have changed dramatically in a fairly short space of time. However, it is important to be reminded that God is still in control. He has not left his Church in any part of the world, but in this part of the world He is letting it be purified and it is a very necessary purification. We may be “fewer but truer” as Pope Benedict said but that can be a call to faith and discipleship rather than a cause for despondency.

We are called to be John the Baptist type disciples in our parishes and even in our homes and families where some of those we love and cherish no longer practice. Living out the Advent message in our own lives can be an example and witness to others. It may require the patience of a saint, or a particular saint like John. People came to John not just to be baptised but to hear what he had to say. We are told even the despotic, corrupt and cruel Herod liked to listen to John.

Let us use our Advent to ask God to provide for us and help us to be an Advent to those we meet whether they be family, friends or strangers. Remember, the word Advent comes from, "ad-venire" in Latin or "to come to". Pope Francis reminds of what Advent calls us to; "Advent invites us to a commitment to vigilance, looking beyond ourselves, expanding our mind and heart in order to open ourselves up to the needs of people, of brothers and sisters, and to the desire for a new world." (Pope Francis, Angelus 2018)

Second Week of Advent



Christ in the House of His Parents, John Everett Millais (1849-1850)

Second Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, you call each of us by name. You chose John the Baptist to prepare a way for your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Give us the courage and insight to hear your personal call so that we too can take the path of goodness and righteousness. Help us to have the courage, like John the Baptist, to never be afraid to witness to our faith. May this Advent be an opportunity to bring Christ and his message of love and peace into our homes, family life and wider parish community. Amen.

Sunday Gospel Luke 3:1-6 The call of John the Baptist

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of Iturea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.

Every valley will be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low,
winding ways will be straightened
and rough roads made smooth.

And all mankind shall see the salvation of God. (JB)

Foreword: Week 3

This coming Sunday is known as, Gaudete Sunday, a day when we step back to some degree from the penitential aspect of Advent and rejoice at the imminent arrival of our Lord and Saviour at Christmas. It is still a time of preparation and it is fitting that in this Sunday's Gospel we are given the ultimate example in John the Baptist of how to carry out that preparation. John was the herald of Jesus but when we look at today's gospel it is almost as if we need to take a double take. The words and advice that John gives seem to be exactly what Jesus would say. In fact, the people who came to hear those words and receive that advice are like the people who came to Jesus when he was carrying out his mission. If you apply simple logic to John's life and work, it is only natural and inevitable that he would pre-empt the message of the one he was preparing the way for. He was a true disciple, and a disciple can only ever reflect the words and teaching of his master.

We are told that a feeling of expectancy had grown among the people who were beginning to wonder if he may be the long awaited and yearned for Messiah. The humility of this disciple shines through. John takes this feeling of expectancy and redirects it and makes it grow even greater. He is actually saying to them that if they think what he was saying and doing is great, then wait and see because one even greater is on the way. He said to them if you feel like rejoicing and celebrating because of what I have said and done, you will have greater cause to rejoice and celebrate because the one who is coming after me is going to outdo me in every way because I am just the disciple, he is the master. I am the creature; he is the creator.

We can have the same feeling of expectancy as we draw nearer to the celebration of our Saviour's birth. The Creator entered his creation out of love for us. He is with us always through his Word and sacrament and he has promised he will come again. Wonderful reasons to rejoice.

Third Week of Advent



The Baptism of Jesus, Fra Angelico (1437-1435)

Third Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

God Our Father, sometimes it is hard to speak the message of joy into a world which can sometimes focus on the negative. We pray that you help us find a way to speak the message of hope and joy into difficult situations and to be a positive presence in the lives of those around us who are suffering, in need and who just find the world a difficult place to be. We place into your hands all those who work for justice in the world. Help us to be a part of that change and to recognise through our Baptismal vocation that we are called to be the bearers of the good news both in word and action. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sunday Gospel Luke 3:10-18

'Someone is coming who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire'

When all the people asked John, 'What must we do?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.' There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate.' Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!'

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them. (JB)

Foreword: Week 4

The scene set out before us in the Gospel is one many of us would be very familiar with. The Visitation is one of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary, and it is entirely appropriate to call it joyful. It gives us the prayer that most of us learn from our earliest days, The Hail Mary. This prayer is steeped in Holy Scripture, and it concludes with a petition to Our Blessed Mother to intercede for us in all aspects of our lives, even to the very end of our lives. The Visitation shows us that Mary put aside all self-concern to travel a significant distance to be with her cousin, Elizabeth. This act of love led to the earliest proclamations of the coming of Christ to be found in the New Testament. Elizabeth greets Mary with the title of “Mother of my Lord.” And John, her unborn son, gives further testimony to the truth of those words when he leaps in Elizabeth’s womb. This is an example of two prophets acting in unison through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We know that John was one of the greatest prophets but there can be a failing to acknowledge that his mother was a prophet too. Both proclaimed their faith in the imminent arrival of the Messiah and in doing so, both prepared the way for his coming. They are great figures for this season of Advent.

On this fourth and final Sunday of Advent we too look forward to the imminent arrival of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We have been listening to the prophets such as Isaiah who foretold that the Holy one of God the Most High would live among us. They didn’t know when that would happen because that was God’s business. Their main concern was to proclaim God’s Word and stay true to their discipleship.

We know that the words of all the prophets, including Mary, Elizabeth and John have been fulfilled. The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us. He has told us that he will come again, either at the end of our lives or at the end of time. We too, don’t know exactly when that will be, but we too are called to rejoice and be joyful in the promises of Christ, proclaim his Gospel and stay true to our discipleship

Fourth Week of Advent



The Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth, Jen Norton (2021)

Fourth Week of Advent

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of your only begotten Son, Jesus this Christmas may we experience the beauty, joy, comfort and peace of the season. Joy - to be reminded of your love for each one of us; Comfort - in the knowledge that Jesus is with us and continues to be present at each moment of our lives; Peace - peace of heart and mind in the knowledge that we can bring all of our worries and anxieties to Jesus. Help us also to recognise that this time isn't just about what we ourselves receive but what we can also give to others in your honour and glory. Amen

Gospel Luke 1:39-45

Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

(JB)

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