



GOSPEL GOSSIP

Stay Awake!

St Matthew 24. 36-44

Sunday 30 November

This Sunday is Advent Sunday, the start of the Church's year. The secular calendar begins on January 1st; the financial new year April 6th, but the Church's year doesn't begin on a set calendar date, but rather a Sunday – Advent Sunday.

For some, Advent is just a countdown to Christmas, a time associated with frantic preparations and diminishing bank balances. For others, it is a time of gloom rather like Lent, only not so high profile; a time when things are put on hold. For the Church, it is a time when we not only prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, but more importantly, prepare for his coming again, not as a feeble baby, helpless and vulnerable, but the King and Creator of all, as we were reminded in our celebrations last week.

As we have been reminded in the gospel readings of the last few weeks, this world and all its pleasures are but temporary. Everything will come to an end. The idea of the 'end of time' is a frightening one, if all we can think of is that it is just that, the end. Finito. End of. Nothing. However, Advent is a season of hope. Our hope is that when (not if) Christ comes again, his kingdom will be fully realised, a kingdom of love, joy, peace. And that above all, it is a beginning, of a new and glorious time. Not the same old, but a new, better.

- What do think Advent is about?
- Is it a time of expectation or worry?
- How do you observe Advent?
- Do you believe that he will come in power and glory to judge the world?
- If you do, how will you respond?

This week's gospel warns us to stay awake, to be ready, but we don't know when all this is going to happen. Jesus reminds us about how the people in Noah's time were impervious to God's warnings, and were carrying with life as usual until the rains started. When we have lost a loved one, we sometimes think that little did they know that when they got up... The Second Comin (as it's called) is not a calendar date like Christmas, to which we can work towards. It may happen before this is posted, or you've read it! But it will happen. And that is why Advent gives us an opportunity to look at the 'Four Last Things' – Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. Two certainties in life: income tax and death – neither of which we can escape!

- What does the Kingdom of God look like?
- Who will enter it?
- Do you believe that judgement will come at the end – of you, of time?
- How can you be ready?
- Is it too tempting just to ignore it – and what might the consequences be?

Advent is not a 'filler', but a positive time for reflection, consideration and action. It is a time when we cannot, and don't want to, escape preparations for Christmas, but rather to enhance our understanding of what Christmas actually means – more than 48 hour binge, but the start of the process of salvation, the making real of God's love for us, and making us one with him and each other.