

Christ Church Freemantle

Sunday 29th November – Advent Sunday

This Sunday is the first of the four Sundays in the season of Advent and marks the beginning of the Church year. The term Advent derives from the Latin noun *adventus*, which meant an approach or arrival, linked to the verb *adventare*, to draw nearer, to advance or approach. It is a season of preparation, which commemorates the first coming of Jesus, as a child some 2,000 years ago, and which looks forward to his second coming, at the end of time. Above all it is a time for us to prepare to welcome Jesus, now, into our hearts. There is a tradition that Advent was instituted by Saint Peter, though there is no evidence for this. It is mentioned from the 5th Century. As a season of preparation, Advent was formerly kept as strictly as Lent. It became a time for fasting and self-denial. From about the 6th Century, weddings were prohibited during Advent.

The lighting of Advent candles is an old custom. A light shining in the darkness of winter was a powerful symbol before the days of electricity. During Advent the daylight hours diminish; in cloudy weather in times gone by, winter nights were sheer blackness. Imagine the anticipation felt by country people on Christmas Eve, as they trudged through the dark, perhaps for some miles, to Midnight Mass. At last they approached the church windows, shimmering with candle-light, and then they entered into the calm, safety and light of the church, to celebrate the birth of Jesus, a light coming into the world!



In my mind, Advent is a time of journeying. I think of the Magi, travelling many miles as they followed the star that fascinated them. Also, at that time Mary and Joseph had to travel from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of some 70 miles. There was a road, but I imagine it was rough, at least in some places. It must have been very hard for Mary, heavily pregnant, whether she walked all the way, or whether she rode on a donkey, led by Joseph. Even if they had a lift in a cart, it would have been a bumpy ride. They probably allowed at least a week to make the journey. At night they must have slept in the open, unless they could stay with friends or relatives on the way. How brave Mary must have been! At times perhaps she thought that she could never make it all the way to Bethlehem, but then I believe that she looked at Joseph, her husband, and trusted that this good, kind man would get her there safely, as he did!

And so Advent is a journey for us. As we travel through the bleakness of Covidland, we place our trust in Jesus, we try to be brave like Mary, and we pray that, with God's help, we shall make it. *Adventabimus*: we shall get there!

Steve Evemy