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Life must be lived in the present and here and now we all have the opportunity to prepare a place for Jesus to be born into our lives.

Often our lives seem dark and cold, just like the winter season when we celebrate Christmas. And it is at those times that we most need love to enrich our lives and wisdom to guide us in how we should use our love for others. When it is dark and cold, a little warmth and light make such a difference! So we need to make space in our lives, amongst all the busyness and distractions of day to day living, for unconditional love and true wisdom to come into our lives, just as Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

To make space in our lives for what is good and true requires us to focus on something that is wrong in our lives, perhaps some selfish characteristic, and seek to avoid it and turn away from it. Only in that way can we be open to receive something good and new. It is like removing old and worn our furniture from a room and bringing in something new and fresh.

A well known Carol sums this up so well:

*O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray;  
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.*

Not only should we take time this Advent season to reflect on how God came into our world in Jesus Christ but we should also think about how we can better prepare ourselves to receive God's gifts of love, peace, joy and wisdom.

*May you be truly blessed with the Lord Jesus Christ's presence in your lives this Christmas and may you share his gifts of love and wisdom freely with those around you.*

# ADVENT

## - Christmas is coming !



For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Isaiah 9:6



## Advent – Christmas is coming

The commercial Christmas seems to start earlier and earlier each year with shops introducing Christmas goods in October and local councils turning on Christmas lights even before November 5<sup>th</sup>! But for many people Christmas really starts with the commencement of the Advent season at the beginning of December. Advent (from the Latin for arrival or coming to) is a season that has been celebrated by Christians since the 5<sup>th</sup> century and traditionally starts on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Christmas. This means that like Easter it has no fixed date and can start as early as 27<sup>th</sup> November or as late as 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

Many people think of Advent in terms of the delightful calendars that can be hung on a child's bedroom wall with windows that are opened one by one to reveal sweets or chocolate as the days count down to Christmas. How many children, I wonder, fail to stick to the timetable and open all the windows too early, just to get to the chocolates!

But we can see the true meaning and value of Advent as a time of preparation for Christmas. At one level it gives us the opportunity to think about the true meaning of Christmas, the celebration of God coming into our world as Jesus Christ, rather than being totally absorbed by all the other more material aspects of the Christmas season. And at another level it reminds us of what we need to do to let love, peace, joy and wisdom into our lives.

The Gospel of Luke tells us of the message of the angel Gabriel:



*“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.”*

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And a little later Luke records the journey to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus:

*And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*



And then the angels appear to shepherds on the hills and say:

*“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

*“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

Advent is time to listen again to the accounts in the Gospels of how God came into our world in order to save us from being overwhelmed by our selfishness and to show us what true humanity really is. It is a time to stop and wonder in awe that God became a man for our salvation.

But we must not get stuck in the historical past. The Advent season is not just a period when we can read and learn about events that took place 2000 years ago, however important they may be.

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