

It is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. (*Romans 13: 11f*)

The Advent Collect

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever.

Amen



All about Advent

CAROL SINGING

Come and join us singing around the streets of the parish on Tuesday 20th December at 7pm. This year we will collect money **for St Margaret's Drop-In Centre on the Vauxhall Bridge Road**. Please meet in St Mary's porch at 7pm. Carol Singing will be followed by mulled wine and mince pies in the Presbytery, 30 Bourne St, at about 9pm. All most welcome!

www.stmarysbournest.com

ADVENT COLLECTION

There will be an extra ADVENT COLLECTION on the Sundays in Advent
in support of St Mary's Cable Street in the East End

USUAL SUNDAY SERVICES

- 9am * Low Mass *at St Mary's*
9.30am Sung Mass *at St Barnabas*
11am High Mass *at St Mary's*
6pm Evensong and Benediction *at St Mary's*
7pm Low Mass *at St Mary's*
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CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Christmas Eve: Sunday 24th December

- 6.30pm Sung Vigil Mass of Christmas *at St Barnabas, Pimlico*
10.30pm Carols by candlelight *at St Mary's*
11pm Midnight Mass *at St Mary's*

Christmas Day : Sunday 25th December

- 9am * Low Mass *at St Mary's*
9.30am Sung Mass *at St Barnabas*
11am High Mass *at St Mary's*
No Evening Services

* "Low Mass" is a said mass, without music, lasting half an hour.

Our longings remind us of the essential human fact that we are talked and touched into life, and that a human race struggling to do all its talking and touching for itself faces a paralysing unhappiness and anxiety. And these longings are also fraught with the danger of illusion, the making of idols to meet our needs... The Christian in Advent needs to listen to such a degree that this season becomes *both* a season of joyful expectancy *and* a season of 'poverty' – of the knowledge that we cannot talk and touch ourselves into life; of that deep poverty of the imagination which can only stand helplessly before the outrages and miseries of the world, utterly at a loss for a word of meaning or hope to speak. We are here at all, celebrating Advent because there *has been* a word spoken, a word of unexpected interruption, a word that establishes for good the difference between the God we expect and the God who comes, a word that shows us once and for all what an idol looks like in face of the truth. We are here because those acts we call liberation and absolution have turned our history into new and strange courses – the history of Israel (up to the present time), the history of a Church struggling to keep open its doors to all people. Yet we cannot imagine how tomorrow and the day after, that form of liberation and absolution will renew itself, how the word will go on making itself heard to renew the world. We are perpetually looking to and giving thanks for an uncovenanted event, a transforming newness, the history of Israel and Jesus; we are perpetually 'on the eve' of God's coming, knowing and not knowing what it will be. Advent insists that we stay for a while in this tension of being 'on the eve', if only in order that the new thing we celebrate at Christmas may have a chance of being truly new for us, not a stale and pious cliché.

There is a risk for any religion that looks to accomplished events as its foundation. The word once unexpectedly spoken becomes *ours*, is absorbed more and more into our needs and fancies and preferences. Once it was strange, now it is familiar and idolatrous. The Advent tension is a way of learning again that God is God: that between even our deepest and holiest longing and the reality of God is a gap which only grace can cross; otherwise we are alone again, incommunicado, our signal and symbols bounced back to us off the glassy walls of the universe.

Archbishop Rowan Williams : Advent : Open to Judgement: DLT, 1994

'Maranatha' is the Aramaic word for 'Our Lord come.'

Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

THE ADVENT VIGIL

The word VIGIL, from the Latin '*vigilia*' means 'wakefulness'. We are bidden to be awake and watchful. (*See the parable in Matthew 25.1-13*).

A Vigil is a service of readings with music and prayers in which we stay awake, keeping vigil so as to become more attentive to God. It is a sacrifice, our offering of ourselves to God, so that God can reach us and move in us, so that we can know God's presence in solidarity with one another and all who through the ages have watched and waited and attended to the Lord.

LIGHT & DARKNESS in the Christian Imagination

In the Christian imagination Jesus Christ is the rising dawn from on high (as in the Song of Zechariah in Luke 1. 68-79 at verse, 78). He is the light that enlightens all nations (Luke 2.31). So from ancient times Christians have faced the east to pray, looking towards the light, watching, waiting for God to bring us salvation.

In the Light, which dawned on the world over 2000 years ago in the birth of Jesus Christ, we have begun (and only just begun) to see and comprehend the mystery of God's power among us to bring Light in our darkness. The Christian community is constantly contemplating that Light which shows us two things: First, the extent and depth of the love of God for his Creation and for each one personally. Christ's light brings a change of perspective on our lives when we discover that we are unconditionally and perfectly loved by God no matter what. Secondly it reveals the absence of light, which is the darkness of sin. (The word 'sin' comes from the Anglo-Saxon word, 'sunder' – the sundering of one from another, which is the opposite of mutual love of one for another in the bond of peace.) By Christ's Light, the terrible consequences of sin are seen in human relationships. Humans are 'trapped by the purposes of their own design' – to borrow a phrase from Iris Murdoch. Intent on being our own masters, the architects of our lives and world order, we end up in rivalry and violence.

God's Light reveals how God is continually bringing healing to us and that Light is also God's judgement on all that is futile and evil.

THREE COMINGS are commemorated (brought to mind) in Advent.

1. The first part of the season is about the Second Coming of Christ at the End of Time, his return in Glory. The readings in this Vigil (and at daily mass in Advent) are full of expectation from the Old Testament up until the last of the great prophets, St John the Baptist. We find ourselves with the people of the Old Testament, full of longing for salvation so that we can feel that too.

2. The second part of Advent begins on 17th December when we begin to contemplate and prepare for commemorating the First Coming of the Lord in his Birth in the great festival of Christmas. This is when the O Antiphons are used at Evening Prayer either side of the Gospel Canticle, the Magnificat (Luke 1.46-55)

3. But we live in the meanwhile between the First Coming of Christ and his Second Coming. In this long, extended 'in-between time' God is continually present to us in all things. We become aware God if we attend. God is drawing us to the Light, drawing us to turn away from darkness, from sin, to be reconciled, to be at one with one another, to work against all that is unjust and to build a new society of mutual love and reverence for Creation. This is God's project and so this is the project of the community of the Church. It takes a long time for God's purposes to be worked out in the human story. God has given us the gift of much time.

IN THIS VIGIL OF LIGHT these themes are brought together and placed before us to contemplate and to ponder. It is not Christmas yet. The real season of Christmas begins on Christmas Eve and continues for twelve days until the 6th January when we celebrate the effect of that Light which dawned upon the world at the feast of the 'Epiphany' (the 'manifestation' or 'showing forth') of the Lord in three Mysteries: the Magi's recognition of the Light; the Baptism of the Lord when Our Lord was confirmed as the Anointed One who came among us in human flesh; and the Wedding in Cana when the first sign was given of who Christ is and does, demonstrated for us as he changed water into wine.

BENEDICTION OF THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT

Christians celebrate the presence of Christ in his Church through words and signs. Sacraments are 'outward and visible signs' which convey to us the power of God, that is, they effect something in us: 'inward and spiritual graces'.

The Eucharist, the Sacrament of Holy Communion, is the greatest sign we have been given by the Lord. We celebrate it daily. God reaches towards us so that he can commune with us. In this way God makes of us a Communion of Persons in mutual love.

In a Eucharist, a mass, there is constant movement towards receiving Holy Communion. In the service of Benediction (and even more so in an Hour of Eucharistic Adoration) it is as if the pause button is pressed. "Hang on! I am in the Presence of the Lord of lords and King of kings."

This brief service enables us to kneel before the mystery of God's communion with us. There is time to be still, to kneel and contemplate God's Presence in

the Sacrament, God communing with you. In the consecrated host on the altar we have the sign of God's presence, but not merely a sign of something that isn't here, but a Sacrament that *is* Christ present to us. There is time to pray and intercede for ourselves and for all the world; there is time to offer praises and thanksgivings to Christ before us on the Altar in his Sacramental presence.

In the service of Benediction the consecrated bread, called the Host [1] is placed in a Monstrance [2]. Benediction means blessing. The service concludes with the Priest raising the Monstrance and making the sign of the cross over us. And so we receive the blessing of Christ who welcomes each of us and will be with us until he comes in glory.

[1] from the Latin *hostia*, "Victim". Christ who offered himself as a victim of human sin offers us himself as forgiving, reconciling love.

[2] from the Latin *monstrare*, "to show"

PRAYING IN ADVENT

LITURGICAL PRAYER : come to mass frequently in the week. All prayer is fundamentally corporate. God calls us into his Body the Church and his Word is addressed to his People.

PERSONAL PRAYER

You can use sacredspace.ie or www.pray-as-you-go.org (free downloads onto your ipod) which are great helps to guide you through.

1. Choose a time and a place to pray, say, for ten/fifteen minutes in the morning and ten/fifteen minutes in the evening, whatever suits you. Make sure you stay for the full time you have chosen to pray.
2. Find the posture that suits you - sitting or kneeling. Light a candle, use an image like an icon if that helps to focus your mind.
3. Begin by remembering that you are coming into the presence of God who is always and only love. God is for you. God accepts and starts with us as we are. This is probably the most important part of prayer to dwell on. A true friend likes you for who you are, not because he can change you. God is such a friend, but deep relationships change one.
4. Prayer is allowing God to move in us. It is not something we do to God.
5. Ask for what you want: e.g. to know and experience God's love for you, to have an interior knowledge of God's forgiveness, or God's will for you.
6. Take a passage of Scripture about God's love (*see the examples below or use the daily reading on sacredspace.ie or the Gospel of the day*) and read it slowly, allowing yourself to savour the words and see what words resonate with you, or hold your attention.

7. God moves in your feelings and mind, depending on how you are. God relates to us intimately. We find this hard to detect so we need to practise this.

8. Talk to God as you would to a friend about what is arising in your mind and feelings. This is how we are in a relationship with One who loves us and understands us better than we understand ourselves.

9. At the end of the time say a closing Our Father or Glory be.

10. Take time to reflect on what happened to you in your prayer time. You may wish to think about finding a Spiritual Director who can help you discern what God is saying or calling forth from you. I would be very pleased to talk about this.

Ps 23 God our true Shepherd

Ps 62 Trust in God alone

Ps 63.1-8 O God, you are my God, whom I seek

Ps 139.1-18 The God who knows me and is always with me.

Isaiah 49. 13-16 Can a mother forget her infant – your name is written on my palms

Hosea 11.1-9 When Israel was a child

Isaiah 43. 1-4 You are precious in my eyes.

May Christ our light bring you light and hope in your observance of Advent as we prepare once more to commemorate the Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour and Light of the World.

Fr David Cherry

ADVENT SUNDAY, 27 November 2011

One year goes and then another, but the same warnings recur. The frost or the rain comes again; the earth is stripped of its brightness; there is nothing to rejoice in. And then, amid this unprofitableness of earth and sky, the well-known words return; the Prophet Isaiah is read; the same Epistle and Gospel, bidding us "awake out of sleep", and welcome Him "that cometh in the Name of the Lord"; the same Collects, beseeching Him to prepare us for judgement. O blessed they who obey these warning voices, and look out for Him whom they have not seen, because they "love His appearing!" ... Let us wait for Him solemnly, fearfully, hopefully, patiently, obediently; let us be resigned to His will, while active in good works.

*Blessed John Henry Newman (1801-1890)
Sermon: "Worship, a preparation for Christ's Coming"*