

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

2nd December 2020

When I was a child, Advent was marked by the daily ritual of opening the window on the Advent calendar (no chocolate filled ones then!) counting down to Christmas with mounting excitement. But now, as then, the season gets hi-jacked by the preparations for Christmas, the carols, Nativity plays and parties long before the Day itself arrives. Although Advent is traditionally a time for prayer and reflection it can be difficult to create and maintain the space we need for it. In the poem 'Watchet Auf' overleaf, Ann Lewin captures something of the pressure we may feel by referring to our 'dual citizenship'. We are citizens of this world with all its rush and bustle but we are also citizens of God's kingdom so for us there should be something else going on too.

The name Advent comes from 'adventus' which means 'coming'. In the ancient world 'adventus' referred to the occasion when the Roman emperor entered a city following a military victory, so it was something momentous. If someone is coming, the rest of us are waiting for them. You might like to reflect on your attitude towards waiting for something or someone. Waiting seems increasingly counter-cultural - we live in a world which expects instant gratification. You might like to ponder why we often don't like waiting. Does it make us anxious? Are we afraid that we are going to miss out? Perhaps ponder too the advantages of waiting - of not grabbing what is there immediately; of not rushing ahead without thinking. Waiting can be a positive experience as it may deepen our longing, heighten our hope and make us more attentive to the present as well as to the future. R. S. Thomas ends his poem 'Kneeling' with the words - 'the meaning in the waiting'. Words which seem to me particularly appropriate for Advent which is the supreme season of waiting.

In this season we are not just waiting to celebrate Christmas. Traditionally the waiting has a triple aspect: we are waiting for something which has already happened - the Incarnation - God taking human flesh and coming among us in Jesus; we are waiting for something which is happening now in the present - God coming into our hearts; and we are waiting for something yet to come - the second coming - the coming of Christ in glory 'to judge the living and the dead'.

This sort of waiting we need to do if we are to find - or at least draw closer to finding - the meaning of the season is not a passive, lounging about sort of waiting. It's more like a cat waiting for a mouse to emerge from its hole - or in the case of our own cats this week for the mouse to slither out of the curtain where it had taken refuge. Endlessly, ceaselessly alert and attentive. In Hebrew, the word for 'wait' has the additional meaning of 'look eagerly for', or 'lie in wait for'. It is often associated with the idea of a watchman or lookout gazing into the distance as in Habakkuk 2:1 'I will stand at my watchpost and station myself upon the ramparts'.

If you haven't already done so you might like to commit yourself to reading and reflecting daily on a Bible passage or some other writing designed to help you watch and wait more attentively for God's coming. You might like to think of it as a different sort of Advent calendar.

Wishing you a blessed Advent with my love and prayers

Camilla

Wachet Auf

Advent.
Season when
Dual citizenship
Holds us in
Awkward tension.

The world, intent on
Spending Christmas,
Eats and drinks its way to
Oblivion after dinner.
The Kingdom sounds
Insistent warning:
Repent, be ready,
Keep awake,
He comes.

Like some great fugue
The themes entwine:
The Christmas carols,
Demanding our attention
In shops and pubs,
Bore their insistent way
Through noise of traffic;
Underneath, almost unheard,
The steady solemn theme of
Advent.
With growing complexity,
Clashing, blending,
Rivals for our attention,
Themes mingle and separate,
Pulling us with increasing
Urgency,
Until in final resolution,
The end attained,
Harmony rests in awful
Stillness, and
The child is born.

He comes,
Both Child and Judge.

And will he find us
Watching?