

Advent 1, 2006

- Jeremiah 33:14-16.
- 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13.
- Luke 21:25-36.

Advent

- favourite weather.
- exquisite imagery: power coming on a cloud, mystery, roses blooming, fig trees giving forth, seeds germinating
- exquisite music, some of which we'll hear tonight at WW.
- exciting feeling of expectation

I've heard some trashy advent sermons over the last 56 years (let's hope this isn't another), and in one of them advent was compared to preparing to go on a journey – packing the cases, and the car and then journeying towards the destination.

But Advent doesn't mean go, it means 'to come to'
It's not that we go somewhere, but that someone or something comes to us.
It isn't us that is active
So not like preparing for a journey, but like preparing for a guest to arrive.

When we were young, parents, visitors
Making things look good.
Magazines on the table to impress?

So we wait – Expectans expectavi psalm 40, but impatiently in my case.

But advent not just about being passive. In biological terms, there is exchange going on in a pregnant woman's uterus between mother and child. Cells of the embryo are invading the mother, changing her for ever, and the mother, through the placenta, is bringing food to the embryo and removing its waste. This is biological fact.

So at this moment in Mary's uterus Mary is feeding the embryonic Jesus, and Jesus's divine cells are invading Mary's tissues. And since Mary represents humanity, you and me, this is happening within us – you and me.

Lancelot Andrewes 1614

'He was not idle all the time He was an embryo — all the nine months He was in the womb; but then and there He even eat out the core of corruption that cleft to our nature and us, and made both us and it an unpleasing object in the sight of God. [We] were by this means made beloved in Him ... this the good by Christ an embryo.'

The embryonic Lord is eating out the core of corruption within us – if only we will let him.

Exchange – two way. Admirabile commercium. Mary's humanity and Jesus's divinity exchanged. God became man so that man might become God (Irenaeus).
SO It's not passive for God, Jesus.

And neither for us, because we have to prepare to receive. Like when we are expecting visitors.

RUSSIAN DOLLS HERE

We already have the divine core within us, but we have let it be clouded, covered, obscured by the layers of sin (our doing) and by layers of scar tissue laid down as a result of the hurts inflicted on us by others.

By getting down to the inner, divine core, that is unprotected – yes. But because of this, its light shines brighter to those outside. Unprotected – yes, but seeing more clearly – clairvoyant.

So how can we do this?

We can start by self examination.

Letting the light within shine into the deepest darkest corners to dissolve these layers

Let there be light – another Advent image

Clearing out the clutter

Letting the light dissolve away the unnecessary coatings

So, allowing the divine core to work from the inside, not resisting

Then when we are ready, there **is** an element of going out to meet him, as Luke tells us.

- We need to be ready to recognise God's arrival.
- We don't have to be perfect, just open, free of things that blind us and bind us – attachments, shoulds and oughts, expectations of others.
- Like children. This is liberty, freedom.
- We listen to the still small voice within and **start cooperating** with it.
- God's filling our skins from the inside – **we don't resist** him.

I've spent too much of my life resting what my inner voice was telling me, for the sake of trying to please other people, and I know that when I stop resisting, it's a very personal and overwhelming thing. It's like two parts of me coming together, no, no, it **IS** two parts of me coming together, and Christians would call one of those parts God. God within filling my skin. Father going out to meet his prodigal son and flinging his arms around him. Skin to skin, interpenetration of bodies, eating flesh and drinking blood. That is why the Holy Communion is such a personal, intimate thing.

I know people who dislike Holy Communion services for that reason. Why some prefer Matins and Evensong at which God is one step removed, where there is not that personal contact. The personal contact that comes when I look into the eyes of a child, and I forget all the cynicism and hardheartedness that 56 years of life has covered me in. The eyes of a child – Jesus encourages us to be as children.

Let me read to you a poem that for me brings together these two themes of **waiting** and **cooperating or not resisting**.

The divine Christ is already at work in us – always has been
Advent is a time when we can Expectans expectavi – sit back and cooperate with the divine Christ within
- wait for him to break through,
and when you feel it happening, go ye out to meet him.

Advent Vesper responsory

Stand ye still, and ye shall see the salvation of the Lord
Tomorrow, go ye forth, and the Lord, he will be with you.