

1st December 2021

A Thoughtful Advent, a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year

Advent is here and Christmas is a few weeks away. The finishing tape is in sight. What a year! Well done to headteachers, teachers, staff, governors, parents and of course the children of our schools. This won't be easy, but try to put your feet up (just for a little while) over the Christmas break. You really deserve it.

It doesn't seem possible that Advent Sunday has passed. In my youth I would have turned on our temperamental, wood-surround, black and white TV to see John Noakes making an Advent Crown with two wire coat hangers, four candles (not in the Two Ronnies sense), some tinsel and sticky-back plastic. That would have signalled the real meaning of Advent – four Blue Peter programmes left before Christmas Day. Now the nation has to rely on Cadbury's to remind us that Advent is not about wire coat hangers after all. It's actually about chocolate.

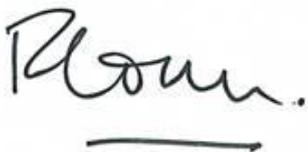
So when does Jesus get a foot in the door? After all, it's his birthday that we're preparing to celebrate!

A couple of years ago, I was amused to hear someone complaining that the church has muscled in on Christmas. CHRIST-MASS. The clue is in the question. Whatever would that person say about the church having an opinion about Advent? One of the key reminders about the real meaning of Advent is the ancient prayer for Advent Sunday. The prayer refers to our celebration of Christmas and it refers to the time when we shall one day see Jesus face to face. It's a both/and. If Advent is only about an event witnessed by some shepherds over 2000 years ago then we could almost be excused for rushing past it on the frenetic charge towards the turkey. But Advent is deeply personal. The prayer encourages us to meet with Jesus day by day, and then one day to meet him face to face.

The prayer also speaks of LIGHT – Jesus himself. At Christmas, one of the well-known Bible readings reminds us that Jesus, the Light of the World, shines in the darkness and that the darkness will never overcome him. This Christmas we remember that Jesus still shines in the darkness of our Covid-filled world. This Jesus has walked beside us as we have battled through the challenges of lockdown and tiered restrictions. He has wept with us when times have seemed too hard to bear. He has danced around the room with us when we have been overjoyed by unexpected gifts of encouragement. He has been our shield and comforter when we felt hurt by criticism. He has been our hope when News at Ten seemed relentlessly bleak in those lockdown days.

It has been quite a year hasn't it? THANK YOU for all that you have done to make your schools places of light and hope.

I pray that you will have a thoughtful Advent, a happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year – and I pray that, as you have been such a blessing to others over the past year, so God may pour his blessing on you.



The Venerable Richard Ormston
Archdeacon of Northampton and Chair of the Peterborough Diocesan Board of Education