



Sunday 29th November is

Advent Sunday

Traditionally, many churches have an Advent wreath, one candle being lit each Sunday in Advent until all are lit on the Sunday prior to Christmas. On Christmas Eve or Christmas morning, a central white candle is lit, the whole symbolising not so much the count-down to Christmas as a reminder of the coming of the Light of the World, Jesus.

I don't know if you've ever waited to watch a sunrise. If my memory serves me right (and increasingly it doesn't!) the only time I've done this was in 1993, when, as part of a group of pilgrims to the Holy Land first spending two nights in the Sinai, I watched the sunrise from Mount Sinai – not from the top, as by the time we had climbed to the open space where the camels and their Bedouin drivers rested, my knee was protesting mightily. Here a few of us waited as the camel drivers lay on the ground, wrapped in their thick cloaks and dozed, as their ancestors had done for thousands of years, while the camels sat, chewing meditatively and staring into space, as camels have done for thousands of years.

There were intimations of the coming dawn: the blue-black sky over the distant horizon began to develop shades of grey, showing us the mountain range beyond and then gradually the light intensified from behind those distant peaks until, after a surprisingly long while, the tip of the sun could be sighted. At that point, it became light very quickly; the Bedouin woke and started to load up the slightly reluctant camels and our fellow pilgrims began to appear from the higher reaches of the mountain.

That experience tells me that we're on the right lines with our Advent candles, showing that the true light comes not as a great lightning-flash, but after a gradual preparation.

One of the psalms I love is **Psalm 130**, with its image of waiting for God being like a watchman waiting for the dawn: we sense the intensity of the sentry standing on the city walls longing for the light to come so that any attack will be shown up rather than sensed amid the shadows. There's an image there for us too, at this time when we are aware of a Covid 'attacker' out there and, like the sentry on night-watch, lonely, weary of it all and longing for the light to come.

I suspect that what we want is a sudden turn-around: the almost frantic enthusiasm with which the news of vaccines is being seized upon shows us how much we want everything to be light and hope immediately. The truth, I fear, is that like the dawn, our release from the shadows in which we currently live will be very gradual, we will see forward only bit by bit. It may be that, like the sentry, we will have to hold out a bit longer, even though we are lonely and tired.

Or maybe we can take a leaf out of the Bedouins' and camels' books, and rest when we can and look about us while we can. Many people said that the initial lockdown had given them time to notice the detail of creation in a way they'd been too busy to do before, and we can still do that even in autumn/winter. We also have time to think – I suspect that part of the reason these thoughts and prayer have caught on to the extent they have has something to do with the fact we are actually giving ourselves time to reflect. So, we keep going: Christ, who brings an inextinguishable light to the world is come, and is coming.

So, if you feel like it, curl up in your cloak-equivalent and have a little sleep. Or think, reflect on what you see and hear. And watch . . . Jesus comes through the chaos and shadow quietly, gently, step by quiet step, bringing light and peace to the earth. Come, Lord Jesus!



Worth considering – at what stage in the dawn would you put the pandemic now? Or where would you put society today: in the shadowy early stages of dawn or in a state of increasing light?

A Prayer:

Living God our Father, we rejoice in the light that Jesus brings,
a light that penetrates the darkness of sin, of fear
to bring forgiveness and hope of a new dawn.

The dawn of a new day, the light radiating across the sky in a multitude of shades
brings with it its own peace, its own hope in new beginning.

By your Spirit, Lord, guide us in seeing and following the light that leads us along right paths
into your kingdom of justice and of peace.

At this time of year when so many thoughts are turned towards celebrations of Christmas;
a meeting together of people, a sharing of gifts, a time of feasting,
we pray for the calm guiding of your Holy Spirit in the changed circumstances of this year.
We bring those who are anxious at the thought they will not be able to meet together
in the numbers they are accustomed to doing, those with a fear of being alone,
those who are anxious about the spending because they have little money or
because the future of their employment is precarious.

For all we ask a calm, an understanding that the love shared among families and friends lives on, whether we are together or apart, whether we are rich or poor.

At this time of uncertainty, we bring those who have important decisions to make:
we bring our own government, asking for them wisdom and compassion.

We bring, too, the leaders of the nations, longing that the powerful might hear the cry of the powerless and that all may work towards that day when nations look beyond their own boundaries to see fellow human beings and not enemies. In a disturbed world, Lord, we pray peace, especially in those places currently locked into conflict and where the innocent suffer and the earth is despoiled.

At this time of shortening days, we rejoice in the special quality of the light, in the glorious colours of sunrise and sunset.

Conscious that many people feel low in the darker months, we pray a special light and joy to fill all our hearts and minds, a light that glows within and shines forth to share your peace with all we meet, just through your love shining from our lives.

Thank you, Lord, for each and every day, blessed by the light of Jesus, in whose name we pray.
Amen

Blessings, Ruth