



Thought for the Week for the first Sunday of Advent
28th November 2021
by Alison Fletcher, Associate Rural Chaplain



“The four Sundays of Advent are not the time when we prepare for Christmas but the time in which we are being prepared for Christmas”

I first read this sentence a few years ago when I attended an Advent quiet day; a day at the start of the Advent season when we took time out to remind ourselves what the season of Advent was all about.

Depending on which church tradition you are familiar with, or maybe none, it is quite possible to get well into adulthood, as I was, before fully appreciating the meaning of Advent and all that it has to teach us.

Of course, I grew up hearing the word, but I think looking back, all I can actually recall was Advent calendars. Even then, it was exciting to open a window each day, and that was way before Advent calendars contained lots of the goodies you now see advertised.

But roll on many years and I now find Advent a very special and significant time of the year. It's the opposite of the run-up to Christmas as painted by TV advertising. It's not all the rushing round trying to fit everything in as the countdown to Christmas gets more and more frantic. It's not the unhealthy competition you often hear how much do you spend on presents? ... how many have you got coming for Christmas dinner? ... or even how many carol services are you going to?

No, the words I've come to realise Advent is really about are stillness, silence, waiting, listening, reflecting. In fact, the polar opposite of our instant/touch-of-a-button lifestyles.

How ironic it is that Christmas is celebrated throughout much of the world with little or no thought for the meaning or person behind it. The story of Christmas is so special, wonderful and life transforming, that we need to take time out to ponder, just as Mary did in the stable setting after Jesus was born. Advent offers us that season and as with most things in life without preparation, we rarely experience the full benefit.

On the Advent quiet day I attended, I was challenged by the following: 'what would we discover if, for the Season of Advent, we took five minutes or maybe ten minutes each day to just sit in silence and stillness, waiting and watching. What would the Coming One, the baby in the manger, show us and say to us?'

Perhaps Advent 2021 is a good time to rebalance our approach to Christmas and slow down for long enough to appreciate the real meaning of Advent.

To quote a well-known phrase – 'the meaning is in the waiting'.