

**DATE: Wednesday November 24**

**CHURCH: St Matthew's Kensington**

**BIBLE PASSAGE:**

**GENERAL THEME/TOPIC: Advent**

The older I become, the faster each year seems to pass. Even this year with its Covid complications, seems to have shot by – and here we are at Advent once again. Last week we celebrated Christ the King and had the traditional white liturgical colour showing. This week it is Advent with the traditional purple liturgical colour showing.

You can read the Bible from cover to cover, but you won't find "Advent" mentioned there. It's a Latin word at its base, "Adventus" and means "a coming." Not quite an arrival, but a being on the way, a coming. Round about the year 380AD there was a church Council held at a place called Sargossa. It was here that one of the church teachings that was discussed was the belief that God became flesh in the form of Jesus, and lived among us. It wasn't until the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries that Advent started to be observed and celebrations were held then.

Many denominations observe Advent including Catholics, Protestants, Methodists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians. Advent is celebrated both corporately in the church and privately in homes. The specific dates of Advent change every year. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day (known as Advent Sunday) and always ends on Christmas Eve.

Advent is all about getting ready for the coming of Christ – whether we are preparing for the celebrating of Christmas when God first came as Jesus, or we are preparing for the Second Coming of Christ as we state in the Creed at every Communion Service. "He will come again in glory ..."

There are various practices and traditions associated with Advent , including keeping an Advent calendar, lighting an Advent wreath, praying an Advent daily devotional, erecting a Christmas tree as well as other ways of preparing for Christmas, such as setting up Christmas decorations. As you drive around at night even now, you will see that some people have already put up their display of Christmas lights outside their homes. They are observing Advent – even though they don't know that's what they're doing.

During Advent, there are a number of Saint's days that occur – St Andrew's Day on November 30, St Nicholas' Day on December 6, St Lucy's Day on December 13, St Thomas' Day on December 21. So the progress of Advent is punctuated by these other festivals where we remember significant people in Christian history.

Do you remember Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids? The wise girls had no idea when the bridegroom would arrive - and that was a custom in Jesus' day for the bridegroom to arrive at any old time, "ready or not" as we used to say when we played hide'n seek. But the wise girls had packed extra oil for their oil lamps, and they would be ready regardless of the time. But the unwise girls were obviously Australians, "She'll be right," they said, and had no extra supplies of oil. They were caught unprepared, and were excluded from the wedding party. Jesus was making the point that people had to be prepared for the second coming. That motto was drummed into me and to everyone who has ever been a Boy Scout – "Be Prepared." Jesus' parable of the bridesmaids is a parable with the Advent theme – he is coming - be prepared. He is coming -get ready.

So, how do we "get ready" for the coming of Christ? Getting ready for his first coming at Christmas is a st of rituals that every person – every family – already has established. The sending of Christmas cards ... purchasing Christmas gifts ... working out at whose home the family will get together this year ... organising the Christmas schedule so we see all the people we need to see ... getting people ready for the Christmas

services ... turkeys ... tinsel ... yet more wrapping paper ... food and drink supplies ... Christmas decorations ...

And there can be spiritual and Christian preparations for Christmas too that we can do throughout Advent ... deciding on a particular person, or cause, or mission to write to, and think about, and pray for, each day during Advent ... taking note of the Advent prayers or collects that we can pray slowly, and carefully, and determinedly, each day of Advent. And on the day itself – or Christmas Eve – you know how there's something missing if we don't get to a church service on Christmas Day ... if we don't sing carols till they come out of our ears ... if we don't see our friends to wish them a "Happy Christmas" – even that part of our personal, annual ritual becomes a part of our getting ourselves ready ... our minds and hearts and attitudes and orientation ready ... for the real meaning of Christmas uncamouflaged by tinsel and Santas and silver glitter.

And, how do we get ready for the Second Coming of Christ – because that is also what Advent is all about. The older we get, the keener becomes our perception that one day we may well meet our Saviour. It will be through our awareness of the presence of God with us day by day ... it will be through our practising the presence of God with us day by day ... it will be through keeping up our supply of oil (to use Jesus' parable terms) so that our spiritual lamps don't lose their light ... it will be living our lives as though we are about to meet Christ any moment now ... it's through being spiritually prepared ... that we get ready for the Second Coming of Christ. May we live closely with Christ ... may we live daily with Christ ... may we live momentarily with Christ, and so know that, should he come to us even today, we are ready ... for we are people of Advent, and we are prepared. (985)