

Advent 1 – Reflection

Pilgrimage through Advent by David Sinclair

Advent might not be for me!
If I believe
that everything is fine,
just the way it is,
Advent is not for me.

If I believe
that the church is fine,
just the way it is,
Advent is not for me.

If I believe
that I am fine,
just the way I am
Advent is not for me.

Advent is not about
preparations for Christmas;
it is about
preparation for the arrival
of the Christ,
the arrival of
his kingdom,
his reign,
his way.

And so Advent
puts everything
-and everyone -
under scrutiny.

Advent asks
the most searching of questions
of me
and demands
that I ask them
of myself.

Advent talks
about renewal,
about change (radical change),
about turning things (and me)
inside out and upside down.

So if,
on reflection,
I decide
that I would really like
to keep things
just the way they are,
Advent is not really
for me.

So, after reading that, is Advent for you?

This poem sets out a challenge. It asks us to consider whether we are open to change and renewal. The format is unusual but the pattern of verses and repetition helps to emphasise each point, making us think about the season of Advent and evaluate our response. Is this what Advent means for you?

Traditionally, the Church has used four themes for the season of Advent; one theme for each week of Advent. These four themes are The Patriarchs, The Prophets, John the Baptist, and Mary. These themes lead us through the message of the Bible from Genesis to the Gospels. They emphasise the idea of preparation – preparation for the birth of Christ, our Saviour. But David Sinclair's poem takes a different theme. He indicates that Advent is about change; the need for personal change, change in the Church, and change in the world.

The birth of Christ brought change to the world, and the impact of that change has been felt for over 2,000 years. These reflections over the next four weeks will provide an opportunity to think about the impact of the birth of Christ – the impact on the lives of some of the people present at the first Christmas, the impact on us nowadays, and the impact on the wider world.

The season of Advent gives us a chance to open our hearts and minds to a greater awareness of the presence of God. It is often referred to as a season of waiting and watching. However, we all know that this is a busy time in our lives. I know that each year I promise myself that I will begin Christmas preparations early so that I will have time to have a more relaxed season of Advent, with more time for reading and meditation. Of course, it doesn't happen! There is always something that gets in the way and the days seem to pass in a whirl of activity. This clearly indicates that there is a need for change in my life – so, Advent is for me.

A time of watching and waiting gives us space in our busy lives to be open to the message of God's love for the world. As we read the Bible we hear of the wonder of creation, the promise of the Messiah, the joy of our Saviour's birth, and the sacrificial love of his death on the cross. But we also read about the way in which humans have turned away from God, rejected his love, and fallen short of his trust in us. The season of Advent gives us a chance to reflect on our own shortcomings and to repent of the way in which we have marred God's image in us. It gives us a chance to change and to look forward to the celebration of Christmas with hope and joy.

Advent can, therefore, be regarded as a pilgrimage. We travel through the season from reflection to repentance and to hope, confident of God's love and grace.

Consider: How can you use the season of Advent as a springboard for change in your life – in spiritual terms and in practical ways?

Prayer:

Lord, we begin our journey in stillness and quietness, open to you and open to your way. Be our companion and our guide as we travel and light our way with your love and grace on our pilgrimage. Amen