

The Meaning of Advent – Behold, He is Coming!

We know about the seasons of nature; Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter. We are familiar with each distinctive part of the year and incorporate them into our life-style. The Church too has seasons and each one has a distinctive characteristic which helps shape our spiritual life.

Today we begin the first season of the Church's worshipping year - Advent. Advent can be crowded out by the Christmas celebrations. Indeed, in some parishes Christmas cribs and trees go up on this day, or in a church near me Carols and Christmas stories took place yesterday!! This is a big mistake and takes away the added insights and depth of Advent that enriches our Christmas celebrations.

"Behold, He is coming!" is the catch phrase to describe Advent. This scriptural passage refers to the Word of God coming to us as one of us. Yet it has a variety of meaning. We celebrate Him because He is coming to us **now**; in the Mass, in the proclaiming of the Gospel, in our prayer life and in the living of our Christian life. We commemorate Him because He came once **long ago** at Bethlehem. We anticipate Him because of His coming **again** in glory. These three aspects are used in the Book of Revelation when John hears the Lord proclaim his identity, *"I Am the Alpha and Omega, who is and who was and who is to come."* In the modern form of the Mass in the Australian Prayer Book there is variation of the Revaluation formula; *"Christ **has** died, Christ **is** risen, Christ will come **again**."* So, Advent introduces this triple understanding of our Lord – he transcends time, yet he is with us always and always comes to meet us. We need this understanding so that, when we see the image of Mary holding the Child of Bethlehem, she the Mother picks up the One who created her and saves her. So too with us – we hold out our hands to receive the sacred Bread of His Body – and behold, we take up the *'I Am the Alpha and Omega, who is and who was and who is to come'*; the Babe of Bethlehem, the Lord of the Universe and my Saviour – today and forever. This theme is also expressed in the classic Collect for this Sunday from the Book of Common Prayer.

Almighty God,
give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness,
and put upon us the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life
in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility;
that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge both the quick and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal.