

Advent is a time of preparation  
a time of preparing our hearts and minds to celebrate Jesus' birth  
and also of preparing for Jesus to return in glory.

Children from angel voices have been thinking about preparations  
About getting ready for school, getting ready to do the milking, getting  
ready to cook a meal and getting ready to welcome a new baby into  
the family.

Some things we prepare for we have a clear idea about when and how  
they are going to happen.

When we get ready to go to school, we know what time we need to  
leave, what we need to take. We just have to get ready.

It's the same for getting cows in to be milked.

There may be some variations – maybe the day you need PE kit, or  
maybe one cow needs special treatment – but generally you know  
what you need to do and the timescale on which it has to be done.

Other things are much less certain – like preparing for the birth of a  
baby when you don't normally know which day they will be born, so it's  
harder to plan.

Advent is a bit like both – planning for Christmas, even with the  
uncertainties coming from a pandemic follows a pattern. I know  
roughly what practical preparations I need to do, and much more  
importantly I know I need to make time to prepare spiritually.

I try to make time amid the card-writing and the shopping and the bed-  
making to remember what it is we're celebrating; to make time to sit  
quietly and re-read the story of Jesus' birth, and to read some of the  
Old Testament passages that foretell his coming so I can wonder anew  
at how prophecies were fulfilled.

I know roughly what I need to do and I know that Christmas Day will be  
on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

But preparing for the second coming is a whole lot more uncertain –  
maybe more like preparing for the birth of a baby. We know it WILL  
happen, but we don't know when. We know everything will change, but  
we don't know quite how, or what it will feel like, or what we'll do when  
the time comes.

The Liturgy for morning prayer in Advent includes these beautiful  
verses and responses:

Now it is time to awake out of sleep,  
*for the night is far spent and the day is at hand.*

Now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed,  
*for the night is far spent.*

Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour  
of light

*for the day is at hand.*

Jesus promised he will come back – for example in Matthew 24:30-31  
he said

*“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all  
the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man  
coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he  
will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his  
elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”*

The first disciples expected that to happen really soon, but we're still  
waiting, 2000 years on but that shouldn't make us doubt Jesus'  
promise.

In his second letter, St Peter wrote *“But do not forget this one thing,  
dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a  
thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his  
promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you,  
not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

And as we thought about at breakfast church last week, some of the  
promises God made to Abraham took a couple of millennia to be  
fulfilled, so why should we wonder at having to wait a similar length of  
time for Jesus to return?

But how should we prepare for Jesus to come back in glory? What  
does the passage Garry read tell us? You might like to have Mark  
chapter 1 in front of you. And I've got three headings that all begin with  
a T to help us remember.

First we need to TRUST

In verse 1 Mark describes his writing as good news.  
Good news of a Saviour who is the Messiah – God’s anointed one, fully human, but Son of God, fully divine  
Mark writes to set out the evidence for this good news, and he starts with the fact that the events he’s telling fulfil ancient prophecy.  
To me this is still one very good piece of evidence for the truth of our faith.  
The prophecies of Isaiah date from at least 500 years before the events Mark is writing about and yet scattered through them we read detailed predictions of events Mark describes.  
Isaiah also tells us of the Messiah who will be a man of suffering and familiar with pain, who will take up our pain and bear our suffering, who will be pierced for our transgressions, and by whose wounds we are healed.  
When I get my preparations for Christmas right, I dip into some of these passages to help me wonder anew at the mystery of the Christ child who came to save us, and to rejoice that all who trust in him have their names written in the book of life, so that we have nothing to fear on the day of judgement.  
So we can TRUST that Jesus is coming back again and that that is good news, because although he will come again as judge, he is also the Saviour who has come to rescue us from sin and death.

But the first prophecy Mark quotes isn’t about Jesus.  
Verse 2: I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way.  
This is about John the baptist, the one who makes straight the highway for our God  
by calling people to REPENT  
which literally means to turn around  
So my second word is TURN.  
to make God’s way straight, I have to change direction,  
to do what he wants, not what I want,  
Because that is what it means to call him Lord  
We sing ‘the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay’  
but it only makes sense to call him Lord if he is in charge  
As a young Christian I was taught *‘if he’s not Lord of all, he’s not Lord at all’*

John’s message wasn’t easy or politically correct, yet people flocked to him  
Watering down the message we have, or altering it to make it more acceptable, won’t do us any good either. Yes, we need to find new ways of explaining the message so that our culture understands it, but message must remain the same.  
We need to tell people that we all need to change – actually they already know the world is in a mess. Do Greta Thunberg or David Attenborough get lots of attention because they have a cosy message? So to prepare for Jesus to come again we need to TURN around, and do things his way. Not just once, but every day, as we come to understand more of how we need to live.

And thirdly to prepare for the second coming we need to TELL  
Jesus last words on earth were the command to go and make disciples of all the nations, which is at heart a call to prepare the way of the Lord, so that all are ready for his return in glory.  
John’s mission was mostly to point to Jesus, and that’s the main thing we have to do – to point out to those around us where Jesus is at work  
We don’t have to have all the answers, we can invite our friends to church, encourage them to read the Bible, to read a book, to watch a video – if they have tough questions that we can’t answer, then we can find someone who does and pass on their answers.  
John says in verse 8 that Jesus is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit  
Jesus tells us that all of us who trust in him will have his Spirit living within us to guide us, to help us prepare the way of the Lord.  
To help us prepare to celebrate Christmas, and help us prepare for his coming again in glory, and to help us help our friends and family to be ready too.

So this advent let us TRUST that Jesus will come again in glory to call us home to himself, let us TURN each day to walk in his way, and let us TELL the good news of our Saviour’s birth both in the words we say and the lives we live.  
Amen.