

Our Advent Adventure

It is interesting that the word ADVENT makes up the beginning of the word ADVENTURE and that makes me think about the season in a different way. It really is an interesting time of the year and we all approach it in so many different ways. Have you ever thought about how you do approach Advent, those four weeks approaching Christmas? Do you see it as an adventurous journey? Maybe we do or maybe not, as we try to negotiate through the maze of tempting Christmas adverts on the television, the bright lights of the shops, online shopping and the pressures of preparing and buying food in crowded supermarkets, for example.

And what of the adventure of the Christmas story? In our age of virtual living, social media and digital communication can we really relate to the story or is it just a glorified nativity play for grown up people. 'Christmas?' 'Humbug' shouts Scrooge, "I have better things to do than keep a ridiculous religious festival. There is business to be done, profits to be made." But Scrooge's comfortable life falls apart: in three terrifying dreams ghosts of Christmas past, present and future, reveal all sorts of possibilities to him - not real, but referring to reality. He doesn't want to make the journey, but the ghosts lead him to different places. Maybe we will find ourselves in a new place too. But can we relate to angels, a stable, donkeys, a baby lying in a bed of straw, shepherds bringing lambs and three wise men? It's such a busy time of the year that it is hard to notice the small light of the star and, as the well-known carol tells us, to listen to what the angels have to say.

The message to Mary was: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you. You shall bear a son and his name will be Jesus. God will give him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will be king over Israel forever. His reign will never end.' (Luke 1:35, 30-33). These short verses, in Luke's Gospel, raise more questions than we can ever find the answers to and it all comes back to Advent being a bit of an adventure.

Any adventure involves risk and uncertainty. I have heard so often, in conversations this year, that particular people will find Christmas very hard to bear because of painful memories and the loss of loved ones. We all approach Christmas in different ways, with different feelings. To some, getting through the festive season will be, a difficult adventure; to some the festive season is just routine, even a chore to bear. To so many others, it is a wonderful time of the year; they cannot wait! Whatever we think or feel, an adventure finds us in situations we perhaps know nothing about, attempting things we are unsure of. There is a cosiness about the Christmas depicted on the cards – the church bells ringing, the snow falling, choirs singing carols, tinsel, coloured lights on trees, a baby in straw surrounded by an array of cuddly animals. There is also the baby, the Son of God, forced to be laid in a manger, in a cattle stall, born to a young, unmarried mother, who, with her husband, had to flee the anger of Herod and eventually, much later as a man, that baby dies on a cross. All this is evidence that God loves us and loves our world today. Thinking more about this, this Advent, is our real adventure and if we do, we may be very surprised where our adventure takes us.