

Come, Lord Jesus!

Three reflections shared by Lyn Smalridge at the Rosyth Methodist Church morning service on the 4th Sunday in Advent, 22 December 2024.
Our readings were Micah 5:2-5a and Luke 1:39-45.



Reflection 1: Advent

So here we are once again at the 4th Sunday in Advent. The fourth candle has been lit and the only one remaining is the central candle, to be lit on Christmas Day to celebrate the light of Christ coming into the world. Excitement mounts as the big day approaches, and we celebrate the miracle of the Incarnation: that Christ was born that first Christmas; that the Lord God of time, space and eternity was born as a human being like you and me, and shared our life.

And once again this Christmas we share again the familiar story, sing the much-loved carols, and reflect on the God who loves us so much that he would take the risk and be born as a baby in Bethlehem and share our life.

Human beings are such a focus of God's love that he willingly chose to come amongst us and share our human life; magnificent and awesome beyond anything our minds can conceive; Incarnate among us as a tiny, helpless baby.

As Graham Kendrick wrote in one of his songs from "Rumours of Angels":

"The One who strode among the stars,
and called each one by name
lies helpless in a mother's arms
and must learn to walk again!"

(Graham Kendrick ©1994)

And he didn't come to some place of relative safety, of privilege and protection, a royal palace or a wealthy family. He came to grow and develop in the innocent womb of a teenage girl betrothed to a carpenter in an insignificant little backwater in an occupied country. And when the time came to be born he was delivered by a young inexperienced mother alone in a stable far from home.

Growing and maturing just like you and me from baby, to toddler, to child, to teenager, to adult. As a young man, after he has been baptized by John in the Jordan, he begins his ministry: preaching and teaching with power and authority, proclaiming the Kingdom of God with miracles and wonders, turning the accepted order upside down, and upsetting and annoying the established religious and political authorities with his message. As Mark puts it:

"The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News"

Fully human – experiencing tiredness, hunger, anger, love, sadness, frustration; facing temptations but not succumbing to them. Fully divine – demonstrating his oneness with the Father through forgiving sins, healing, miracles and his authority.





This is man, this is God – the promised Messiah, the Christ! Immanuel – God with us. But, at the time, so many missed it! Graham Kendrick again:

“So many centuries of watching
and waiting
but when the moment came,
well nobody saw.
Traders and travellers hurried by
and life went on just like before.”

But Christ **had** come! And as we were reminded in our reading from the prophet Micah, written some 700 years before Christ, God fulfilled his ancient promise in Jesus. And in a few days, we will celebrate fully once again, in the miracle of the Incarnation.

But in Advent, along with preparing and celebrating that Christ has come, we also turn our attention to the promise that he will come again: **Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!** Familiar words from our liturgy for Holy Communion, based on the promises from Holy Scripture; the essence of our faith and belief. Perhaps Advent is a time to remind ourselves that, **because he died, and because he is risen, he will come again!**

As we know fear, ignorance and duplicity led to Jesus being arrested on trumped-up charges: tortured, violated and abused, and crucified and laid in the tomb. **Christ has died!** But of course, that wasn't the end of the story: **Christ is risen!**

The lynch-pin of the Christian faith is the resurrection ... if Jesus didn't die and rise again, then we are all deluded. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians “we are of all people most to be pitied. The Apostle Peter wrote in his first letter:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3)

This wasn't hearsay gossip from some random person off the streets of Jerusalem, but a friend and a witness of Jesus who had experienced the truth. Peter knew what he had seen: his friend, mentor, and Lord was crucified, yet raised from the dead!

Peter knew that, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, Christianity was a fake! Definitely not something for which you would give your life. Which, of course, Peter ultimately did. But if Christ **has** been raised from the dead, then our hope is great, and our hope is alive. It's better than the best news imaginable! It's more urgent, timeless, and valuable than anything else in this world. And Peter believed this with every breath he had. **Christ is risen!**

And if you are not yet as convinced as Peter was, keep searching, keep praying, reflecting and wondering. Ask Jesus this Advent to reveal his power and glory to you in a fresh way, so that you can truly join with believers across the world who proclaim that, **because he died, and because he is risen, he will come again!**

Advent is a time to prepare, remember and celebrate that Jesus came that first Christmas; that he lived, died and rose again victorious over sin and death and all that would separate us from God. But also, to be reminded of the promise that he will come again!

Christ will come again! How do you feel about that? If we are honest, we maybe think: “Yes! Come Lord Jesus” But maybe not today! Not just yet! I don't think I am quite ready! Well, ready or not, he is coming anyway!

Reflection 2: Supernaturally natural

Perhaps our reluctance for him to come now stems from an expectation that he is coming to judge us. which is the case – that is a promise of Scripture – but our idea of that judgement is of a stern and angry judge looking for any fault or misdemeanour to punish and condemn us.

But our judge is Jesus in whom there is “no condemnation” – the righteous judge who judges with mercy, compassion and grace, and who in love has already met the consequence of that judgement, served the sentence, paid the price in full.

No matter how bad it gets, this world is in God’s hands; his righteous judgement must be fulfilled. And this is not something to fear, but to look forward to and celebrate.

You may point out that in NT times they obviously believed that Christ’s return was imminent:

“This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is, time is running out.”
(Romans 13:11).

And yet two thousand years later – where is he? But, as I mentioned earlier, Micah prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem 700 years before the event – God’s timing is not like ours! So, we should not question ‘if’ but trust that he promised he would return, and therefore he will! No ifs, buts or maybes, because God keeps his promises.

Because he died, and because he is risen, he *will* come again!

And we may live confidently and expectantly, playing our part to bring God’s Kingdom closer and to be beacons of hope to those who are lost.

As told by Luke, Mary’s story is full of supernatural events. To begin with, her relative, the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, is visited by a supernatural being – an angel – while serving in the temple. The angel tells him that his wife, who has been unable to have children and is passed the usual childbearing age, will have a son, and that they are to name him John. The news of this supernatural event is so amazing to Zechariah that he struggles to believe it and is struck dumb, but his wife Elizabeth becomes pregnant shortly afterwards.

Then Mary herself is visited by the same supernatural being – the angel Gabriel – who tells her that supernaturally she will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and the baby born to her will be holy and called the Son of God. And the angel assures her that she can be confident of this because of Elizabeth’s supernatural pregnancy.

Then, in our reading today, Mary visits Elizabeth, and the supernatural events continue: Elizabeth’s baby leaps in her womb, and she is filled with the Holy Spirit, and reassures Mary that she is indeed blessed by God. In response Mary launches into that wonderful hymn of praise that we know as the Magnificat.

The American priest and theologian Ronald Rolheiser comments that:

“Mary affirms in the Magnificat a deep truth we can only grasp in faith and hope. Namely, that even though at present injustice, corruption and exploitation of the poor seem to reign, there will be a last day when that oppressive stone will roll back from the tomb and the powerful will topple. The Magnificat is the ultimate prayer of hope.”





The story continues with Elizabeth giving birth to her baby and, in contradiction to convention, insists he is to be called John. When Zechariah confirms that this is so, his speech returns and he praises God and prophesies about his son's role in the Gospel story.

As Luke continues the familiar story, Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem and Jesus is born. And the supernatural events continue: shepherds out on the hillside are visited by a host of angels, and given a message about a new-born baby born in Bethlehem. And not just any baby, but the long-promised Messiah. But, amazingly, they will find this baby lying in an animal's feeding trough – a manger. And when they check it out, it is all exactly as the angel had said.

But in the midst of all these supernatural events we have the most natural thing in the world, a young woman giving birth to her first baby, just as millions have done before and since. Part of the miracle of Christmas is that our supernatural God comes amongst us in the most natural of ways. Christ is born!

Reflection 3: Present to the presence

In the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux, who was the founder of the Cistercian order of monks, said Christ comes to us in three different ways: firstly, in Bethlehem at Christmas; secondly, at the end of the age; thirdly, in the lives of believers every single day.

So, in these weeks leading up to Christmas, we reflect on the Advent of the past – the Incarnation – and on the Advent of the future – when Christ returns in glory – but we also need to be aware of the Advent now! Here! In the present!

At some point this Christmas in our house we will probably watch again for the umpteenth time the film *Love Actually*. And you will remember how Billy Mack an aging rock star, brilliantly played by Bill Nighy, tries to make a comeback by recording a version of the old Troggs song *Love is all around*: "I feel it in my fingers, I feel it in my toes, Love that's all around me and so the feeling grows" Except that, in Billy Mack's version, he sings "Christmas is all around".

But, in a very real sense, love *is* all around. Because Christ is all around, in every moment; because, as Father Richard Rohr says: "We cannot not be in the presence. The presence is infinite, always, everywhere and forever."

The problem is that we are not present to the presence! We are somewhere else – living in the past, or worrying about the future – and missing Jesus in the here and now.

The end of this Advent season can be full of pressures: "Will that Amazon delivery come in time?"; "Did I remember to order the turkey?"; "I got a card from ... but haven't sent one back!" In all the busyness, tinsel and lights, we can miss out on Advent now!

So, for now, let's pause and take a moment to experience the Eternal Advent, the Advent of now and always; take a moment to be still and be present to the Presence. God is incarnate in *every* moment, not just at Christmas. Emmanuel – God with us – Jesus – truly *is* all around. Love is all around!

The photograph taken by Debby Hudson was made available via the Unsplash platform and can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y2pswtyd>.