

TRINITY NEWS

The Right Attitude in ADVENT

What are you thinking about in these weeks of Advent?

I guess you're thinking very much about what you've planned for Christmas and the New Year!

- travelling to the family, or how to accommodate a visit from them
- buying gifts
- making sure there'll be enough food and drink
- Trying to find enough money for carol singers and others coming begging at the door!

Well, what *should* we, as Christians, be thinking about during Advent? Our primary thought should be on Christ's *second* coming as Judge of all the world. Whether he comes first to us, or *we* go first to him *in death*, we need to have a lifestyle he approves of. In 1 Thess. 5; in vv.12-22 we find, in the words of William Barclay, 'a chain of jewels of good advice' fired at us in rapid succession, like rounds from a machine gun! A series of verses often 2, 3 or 4 words long. Why is Paul in such a hurry to get these instructions across? Is he running out of papyrus? One day we must ask him.

vv.12-13a are about our attitude to church leaders,

vv.13b-15 are about fellow church members,

vv.16-18 about our general bearing,

and vv.19-21 about our attitude to charismatics.

Church Leaders (vv.12-13a)

Respect your church leaders for they *labor* among you. We all know the jibe that the parish priest (or perhaps the Dean) only works *one* day a week! I remember a forthright lady in my first parish speaking scornfully about 'parsons', as they were called: "All they do is 'swan' around and drink cups of tea in people's homes!" she said. I was relieved then to hear her say one day, after she'd got to know me, "You're a young man with a job of work to do." That's as it should be. My former Principal Dr. Leon Morris makes the point in his commentary that *effective leadership* requires *effective following* – not carping criticism...but prayer, and sometimes constructive advice and help.

Fellow Church Members (vv.13b-15)

- Be at peace among yourselves – how important!
- Reprove the idlers. The Greek word means ‘disorderly’ and is used of soldiers out-of-step!
- Encourage the faint-hearted – the shy
- Help the weak, the Greek says ‘cling onto’ the weak (in faith?). How sad it is if people drop out of church attendance, and nobody bothers to find out why!
- Be patient with all – I’m not naturally that!
- Never repay evil with evil. “But,” we cry, “we’re only human!” Let’s pray and try not to retaliate.

Our General Attitude (vv.16-18)

‘Rejoice always’ – Are we to take ‘laughing gas’? No, this comes from knowing that God’s in control of our lives. ‘Pray without ceasing’ – How? It means, I think, be in a relationship with God of child to Father, from which you can send up ‘arrow prayers’ to him at any time. ‘Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God for you.’ There are times when things just won’t go the way you want. We can become resentful, but if we try to give thanks and to see God is achieving something good in our lives, even through this unpleasant thing, it can prove a blessing to us.

Attitude To Charismatics (vv.19-21)

St. Paul says in 1 Cor.12:28: *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing... various kinds of tongues.* The Corinthian church really went to town on charismatic gifts; the Thessalonian church appears to have been the *opposite*, minimizing such gifts, and Paul has to tell them ‘not to despise the words of prophets’. In an Anglican church I know a man among the laity claimed to receive prophetic messages. Normally they were for himself and perhaps Bible Study group he belonged to. But once he had a message for the whole church. Another member of the group went to the parish priest and told him. Hearing it, she said later, “He looked like a frightened rabbit!” We may not sing with our arms in the air, nor have experience of tongues or prophesy, but let us not reject out-of-hand those who do. I had one with a prophetic gift in my last church, and she predicted once I was going to fail an exam – and I did! Normally her messages were more positive. *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God,* says St. John (1 Jn.4:1). Test them against Scripture, your inner sense, and perhaps common sense and ‘hold fast what is good and abstain from all evil’.

How much there is to learn here for church life in Advent – and indeed all the year round!

Rev. Dr. Andrew Daunton-Fear

FAMILY SERVICE/CHRISTMAS PAGEANT. Performance on the 24th, 4pm. Open to all ages (adults/kids). A sign-up paper is posted on the board for those who wish to participate.

Rehearsal schedule: Dec. 14 & 21 after the service

NEXT WEEK'S READINGS: *Second Sunday in Advent:*
(OT) *Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85;* (NT) *2 Peter 3:8-15a, 18;* (G) *Mark 1:1-8*

UPCOMING EVENTS:
December 14. Lessons and Carols, 7:30pm