



**DURHAM
CATHEDRAL**

THE SHRINE OF ST CUTHBERT

Praying Together

*during the week beginning Sunday 29 November
The First Sunday of Advent*

During this time of great anxiety and uncertainty, we want to stay in touch with our regular worshippers and indeed with everyone who is associated with the Cathedral family.

We very much regret that we have once again had to suspend congregational worship here at the Cathedral but our Sunday and daily services will continue to be live-streamed via the Cathedral's Facebook page. Public worship resumes on Wednesday 2 December.

Until then Durham Cathedral is open for private prayer and quiet reflection between 10.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. on weekdays and between 11.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. on Sundays.

Gospel

Mark 13. 24-end

Jesus said, 'But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the

watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

Thought for the Day

by the Reverend Canon Michael Hampel

In Ancient Greece, in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, was inscribed the Greek aphorism, 'Know thyself'. And, inevitably, down the ages, philosophers have debated what this great saying means and have suggested several very attractive interpretations: do not let your boasts exceed what you are; the better you know yourself, the better you can understand other people; pay no attention to the opinion of the multitude.

The Advent season of judgement which begins today, set against the backdrop of a contemporary culture of blame, may be a good time to inscribe that aphorism over the doors of this house of God. The gentle warning that lies behind those ancient words, 'Know thyself', would be a timely antidote to the strident tone of accusation that has become increasingly voluble from armchair critics and tabloid headlines. Nothing is ever our fault: it's always someone else's fault. For example, until I am clear about my own responsibility for the current economic crisis, I have no right to blame anyone else for it. Know thyself. And, unless one lives in the eye of a storm, the storm provides no valid material for the sermons of armchair pontiffs. Know thyself.

The season of Advent, whose liturgy and music is striking, emotive, rich, and resonant, somehow manages to survive the early onslaught of Christmas but that early onslaught is the principal reason why the focus of Advent is almost entirely lost in the popular imagination. We know that Advent is, on the one hand, a countdown to Christmas – and there's nothing wrong with that. We are indeed preparing to welcome Christ in his 'first coming' among us as the child born in a stable in Bethlehem: that glorious moment when God became more like us so that we could become more like God. But Advent is also about our death – about that moment when we will stand in the presence of God, under judgement – about the 'second coming', as it's sometimes described. But never mind the language and the imagery, the bottom line is that Advent is about death, our death. And, of course, we don't like talking about that, do we? Any more than we like examining our own souls. Any more than we like finding out the truth about ourselves. Know thyself.

I suppose that's why the contemporary culture of blame thrives. The more we blame others for the perceived ills of society, the more we excuse ourselves; and the more we excuse ourselves, the more we avoid responsibility; and the more we avoid responsibility, the more we require others to sort the mess out for us. At least Pontius Pilate had the grace to admit that he found no fault in his antagonist. But it is this spiral of negligence and denial, this failure to take responsibility for our actions, which was also the catalyst to events in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. When the Messiah failed to produce 'jam today', he was demonised by the crowd and done away with as a lost cause and a waste of a good palm branch. Now Jesus, on the cross, was supposed to be the scapegoat to end all scapegoats. And, if we believe that to be true, as we said a few moments ago in the Creed that we did, we have to stop looking for new scapegoats – 'experts' or politicians spring to mind for example.

You see, when I die, it will be me standing before God, not you. And, when you die, it will be you standing before God, not your neighbour. So, the focus of Advent must be about you and God and not about anyone else and God. Which means, if you think about it, that Advent works against a culture of blame and how refreshing that is? Perhaps we might say that Advent encourages a sense of shared responsibility because, if each of us examines ourselves and admits that we do have a share in responsibility for the world's woes, we may find ourselves looking at each other not only with a sense of shared responsibility but also with that adage in our head that 'a trouble shared is a trouble halved' because we can then set about rebuilding what is broken together and making up the deficit (in various senses of that word) together.

Advent is indeed about judgement but it's about God's judgement and not the opinion of the multitude. Nor is it a judgement of which to be afraid. The cross draws a line in the sand in relation to judgement. The easy yoke and light burden of God's judgement merely asks the question: do you judge yourself or do you judge others? In Shakespeare's play, 'Measure for Measure', Isabella pleads for her brother's life as he awaits the death penalty for sexual impropriety. She urges her cause with Angelo who has sentenced him and, in words which draw on Christian doctrine more than anything else in the whole canon of Shakespeare, she challenges him: 'Go to your bosom, knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know that's like my brother's fault.' Jesus said, 'Judge not that you be not judged.'

The challenge, this Advent, is to exercise judgement over ourselves and not over others, to prepare ourselves for our death, when we still stand – alone – before the presence of God. The culture of blame is alien to the Gospel of Christ. Know thyself.

A Form of Intercession for Advent

Watchful at all times,
let us pray for strength to stand with confidence
before our Maker and Redeemer.

That God may bring in his kingdom with justice and mercy,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That God may establish among the nations
his sceptre of righteousness,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That we may seek Christ in the Scriptures
and recognize him in the breaking of the bread,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That God may bind up the broken-hearted,
restore the sick
and raise up all who have fallen,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That the light of God's coming may dawn
on all who live in darkness and the shadow of death,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

That, with all the saints in light,
we may shine forth as lights for the world,
let us pray to the Lord:
Lord, have mercy.

We commend ourselves and all for whom we pray
to the mercy and protection of our heavenly Father:

Almighty God,
as your blessed Son Jesus Christ
first came to seek and to save the lost;
so may he come again to find in us
the completion of his redeeming work;
for he is now alive
and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen.

Calendar of Holy Days

Monday 30 November

Andrew the Apostle

Almighty God,
who gave such grace to your apostle Saint Andrew
that he readily obeyed the call of your Son Jesus Christ
and brought his brother with him:
call us by your holy word,
and give us grace to follow you without delay
and to tell the good news of your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Thursday 3 December

Francis Xavier, Missionary, Apostle of the Indies, 1552

Friday 4 December

John of Damascus, Monk, Teacher, c 749

*Nicholas Ferrar, Deacon, Founder of the Little Gidding
Community, 1637*

This year's Advent Procession with Carols has been pre-recorded and will be available as an online act of worship which will be broadcast on the Cathedral's Facebook page and YouTube channel from 6.00 p.m. on Saturday 28 November and available for a limited period. We hope that you will engage with us in this great and moving act of worship to mark the beginning of the season of Advent.

Hymn

Hark! a herald voice is calling:
'Christ is nigh,' it seems to say;
'Cast away the dreams of darkness,
O ye children of the day!'

Startled at the solemn warning,
Let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her Sun, all sloth dispelling,
Shines upon the morning skies.

Lo! the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all to be forgiven;

So when next he comes in glory,
And earth's final hour draws near,
May he then as our defender
On the clouds of heaven appear.

Honour, glory, virtue, merit,
To the Father and the Son,
With the co-eternal Spirit,
While unending ages run. Amen.

*6th century Latin,
translated by Edward Caswall and others*

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Poem: Advent Calendar by Rowan Williams (born 1950)

Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan, Lord Williams of Oystermouth, is not only a significant theologian and thinker but is also a poet. We used his poem, Advent Calendar, last year at the Cathedral's Advent Procession. In it, he earths the birth of Christ in the very elements of natural and human experience. This is incarnation in the climate and the harsh sensation of winter—death shrouding new life in the impending Spring. It reminds us that, almost in the words of T S Eliot, Christ's coming will be hard and bitter agony for us—like death, our death. But, just as a child brings hope of tomorrow, so Christ will redeem the present and resurrect the morrow.

He will come like last leaf's fall.
One night when the November wind
has flayed the trees to the bone, and earth
wakes choking on the mould,
the soft shroud's folding.

He will come like frost.
One morning when the shrinking earth
opens on mist, to find itself
arrested in the net
of alien, sword-set beauty.

He will come like dark.
One evening when the bursting red
December sun draws up the sheet
and penny-masks its eye to yield
the star-snowed fields of sky.

He will come, will come,
will come like crying in the night,
like blood, like breaking,
as the earth writhes to toss him free.
He will come like child.

A Prayer for use during the Coronavirus outbreak

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

A Prayer for Advent

Wilderness is the place of Moses,
a place of no longer captive and not yet free,
of letting go and learning new living.
Wilderness is the place of Elijah,
a place of silence and loneliness,
of awaiting the voice of God and finding clarity.
Wilderness is the place of John, a place of repenting,
of taking first steps on the path of peace.
Wilderness is the place of Jesus, a place of preparation,
of getting ready for the reckless life of faith.
We thank you, God, for wilderness.
Wilderness is our place.
As we wait for the land of promise,
teach us the ways of new living,
lead us to where we hear your word most clearly,
renew us and clear out the wastelands of our lives,
prepare us for life in the awareness of Christ's coming
when the desert will sing
and the wilderness will blossom as the rose.
Amen.

The next issue of *Praying Together*
will be published on Monday 7 December