

We are fast approaching the season of advent, and the festivities of Christmas for another year will soon be upon us. What's that I hear? Is that a collective groan at the thought of all that work which will be needed to ensure this Christmas is a success? That is often the response we make, but if that is truly how we feel, perhaps we are concentrating on the wrong part of the advent season. The stresses and strains of getting ready for Christmas are not part of a Christmas story where we celebrate the incarnation of the Prince of Peace, but are the result of the pressures we put upon ourselves to conform to the modern celebration of this festival.

The first Christmas was a very simple affair, which we may have lost sight of. If we think back to the original story, yes, there were the stresses and strains that Mary and Joseph had to overcome in travelling to Bethlehem to register for the census, but the birth of Jesus, which is the focal point of what we are celebrating, happened quietly and calmly in a simple room, and passed almost unnoticed, except for a few shepherds and some wise men.

I am not going to bemoan the increasing commercialism of Christmas, because even though this is not what Christmas is all about, it does ensure that the birth of Jesus is an event which remains at the front of everyone's mind, and for some, is the motivation to visit our churches, where they will receive a message of love and peace at this busy time. Perhaps now, more than at any other time of the year, we should be able to proclaim aloud the Good News of the birth of Christ.

Advent, is a time of preparation, a time for looking forward with excitement, not with dread, but with joy.

**A – anticipation** – a positive expectation of Good News

**D – determination** – a commitment that this Christmas will make a difference in our lives and those around us

**V – valued** – a reminder that Jesus came to share the love of God with everyone, and we should do the same

**E – encouragement** – we are surrounded by the love of God, through whose strength we can achieve more than we can imagine

**N – nativity** – a reminder of the birth story which we can share with family and friends

**T – thanksgiving** – we thank God for the incarnation of Jesus and the hope this gives us all, shown through the love and grace of God

**Isaiah 9.6:**

'For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'

May God richly bless you, your families and those you love, this advent and Christmas season.