



Bishophurst Window Advent 2023

**“O come, O Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us with your drawing nigh.”**

An Advent Message from Archbishop Anne

We sang the ancient hymn, O Come, O Come Emmanuel at the Advent Service of Lessons and Carols this week. Perhaps you sang it during your service. Outside it was dusk, that mysterious time of the day that hovers between light and dark, which is particularly beautiful in a Northern Ontario December.

Advent is a spiritual dusk as we wait in the half-light for Christmas to arrive. It’s an odd kind of waiting for us Christians, isn’t it – this movement between the overflowing joy of being already redeemed and the ‘not yet’ redeemed as we await his second coming to consummate history. We know the future is sure, that our joy will be complete – but we are not there yet.

Inside the Cathedral, the single light from one candle on the Advent wreath shone outwards, a hope-filled and treasured reminder that light shines in the darkness that is all around us. The darkness of war. The darkness of evil. The darkness of sin. The darkness of despair. The darkness of disease. The darkness of depression. The darkness of anxiety. The darkness of hopelessness. Light, we know, is the antidote of darkness.

More than ever before as we sang that hymn, I heard the yearning in the words of this two-fold prayer for the first and the second coming of Christ. In it we are taken to the longing of the people of Israel for the coming of the Messiah. This longing for the Messiah to come quickly is echoed through time in the prayers of the church of Jesus Christ today.

No doubt Advent's arrival has stirred up in you, as it has in me, a similar kind of longing for simplicity, peace, time to rest, and a deeper meaning to life. Perhaps you are already experiencing some of these gifts this Advent. The reality of life is usually quite different as we rush about in frenzied activity spending, organizing, visiting, baking, wrapping, serving, adding final touches, and despairing that we will ever be ready for Christmas. Some people may be too tired, too weary, too cynical to bother with any of it.

The church's Advent practices of pondering the promises of God made through the prophets of old, of straining forward to see the dawning of the 'Dayspring from on high', of praying for bitter conflicts to cease, of walking in the footsteps of defiant Zechariah and hopeful Elizabeth, of preacher John the Baptist, and faithful and obedient Mary and Joseph, invite us to reflect on our lives and how we are being invited to change – from the inside out.

Because one thing is for sure. We are not the same people we were a year ago. In subtle or dramatic ways life's events, personal, local, and global have challenged and changed us. Our stories over the past year will include losses and gains, unwanted changes, terrible sorrows, and exuberant joys.

Advent begins a new year in the church. It invites us to take an honest look at our lives (including the fine messes we have made) and how our personal story has changed over the last year. Advent is a good time to ponder those things that have had the greatest impact in our lives as we prepare for a new year. It's a time to ponder all the things that have gone wrong that we simply cannot fix. Making a laundry list of the darkneses in our own lives – reminding us evermore of our need for a Saviour.

But the season of Advent isn't only about us. It's about God and what God is up to in our lives and our faith communities. In this season of attentiveness, of patient waiting and watching, we are invited once more to look around and notice where God is at work in our midst.

If Christ were to come to your church today, where would he find hope alive? Where would the person walking in terrible darkness see the light of Christ in your midst if they arrived at your front door? Would they be welcome, would you let them in?

Here we are in Northern Ontario and Quebec in the Dioceses of Algoma and Moosonee, ordinary people in ordinary churches who often think that the light of our single candle won't make the blindest bit of difference in overcoming all the darkness we know is there in our own communities.

Alone we can only do so much, but together we can do so much more. We, as the whole people of God, the body of Christ, have been empowered by God's grace and the Holy Spirit to go out into the darkness bearing the light of Christ. We aren't to pretend that the darkness isn't there, but rather, and bravely, to 'put on the armor of God' (Ephesians 6), to BE THE LIGHT and walk alongside those caught in the darkness, just as Jesus would do.

A few weeks ago, I received an email from a woman in her seventies who once lived across the road from me on Simpson Street. In 1974, she applied for and received a small grant of \$2000 from the Anglican Foundation of Canada. With the help of those funds and the hospitality of Anglican churches from here to Vancouver, a group of young people made their way across Canada in a bus. That's an incredible story on its own, but there's more. This year, the writer met up with one of the people who went on that cross Canada trip who said that time literally saved their life. We never know the difference the single light of a candle makes.

This Advent and Christmas know that you have enough light in you to be the Light for someone else. You have precious gifts to give that are not wrapped with any bow. You carry within you the good news that Jesus will come as he promised. You have within you the hope that can disperse the gloomy clouds in another's life and send death's dark shadow away.

May this Advent be for you and your church a precious holy time of preparation for the dawning of a new day with the arrival of the Christ-child. A day that will bring new hopes and new possibilities. Let us watch and wait together with unshakeable hope for the Prince of Peace.

With my love,

+Anne