



**THOUGHTS FOR  
ADVENT SUNDAY  
28 November 2021**

*The Advent Season*

Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 21:25-36



Of all the seasons in the church calendar, I think Advent is my favourite.



Given that the traditional theme of the season, The Four Last Things, Heaven, Hell, Death and Judgement, is not the jolliest, this, perhaps, is rather strange. If one looks instead to the characters who we mention through the weeks of Advent as we light a new candle on the Advent wreath, the Patriarchs, the Prophets, John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary, we again find a rather grim undertow, as all these people, no matter how significant their witness, manifest much in their lives of sorrow and hardship. The gospel reading for this morning also carries a very sobering message of fearful natural signs and the heavens being shaken., and carries with it the challenge to ‘be alert at all times’, something that it is not easy to be. Yet still I say, this is my favourite among the church seasons.



I think that has a lot to do with the great Advent hymn, *Veni, veni, Emmanuel*. I remember singing it at Holy Trinity, Darnall, in Sheffield as a small boy, and learning to look out for its return the next year, on the next Advent Sunday. Its haunting melody seized my young imagination, and its text, based on the ‘Great ‘O’ antiphons’, spoke to me of mystical things of ultimate worth, beyond the commonplace of everyday life and looking towards a time and place where all the fears and miseries of life would be transformed into something glorious. Every church in which I have worshipped regularly since then has sung it, and it works its magic still upon me. (I shall use its words as the basis for our prayers in a little while.)

For me Advent is a time to confront our inner demons and to come to acknowledge to ourselves what we are made of; recognising our inadequacies, but also embracing our strengths, admitting to ourselves the grubby compromises we have made, whilst rehearsing the principled stands we have taken, confessing our failures to love, but rejoicing in the love we have given and in the love we have received. But doing all this in the confidence that God loves us so much that he was prepared to sacrifice His Son to our collective worst nature so that we need not feel estranged from Him.

Our first lesson today, from Jeremiah, refers to the promise made to the houses of Israel and Judah, that they will be saved and live in safety. Today's gospel certainly contains elements of threat and menace, but it offers hope as well, "raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near".



Great events, earth shattering events will take place, and they are the prelude to the coming of the Son of Man with power and great glory. This will be at once a time truly awful, in the sense of inspiring profound awe, but also a time of infinite consolation. This is something Wesley and Cennick captured in their great Advent hymn, "Lo! He comes with clouds descending" with its promise of rapture in the Kingdom of God.

*Lo! He comes with clouds descending,  
Once for favoured sinners slain;  
Thousand thousand Saints attending  
Swell the triumph of his train:  
Alleluya!  
God appears, on earth to reign.*

Clive Lemmon