

Advent

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We are now entering the season of Advent, one of the great festivals of the church, and to me one of the most exciting and challenging of them all. It takes us back to before God created the earth when, as the hymn puts it, *the waters covered the sea*. Then God created life, humans, beasts and fowls of the air.

The Bible leads us through the story of how all this happened. There was the Garden of Eden. Here Adam gave his rib to form Eve. Eve sinned and picked forbidden fruit and this led to their ejection from paradise. She had been urged on by the snake, who was condemned to crawl on his belly for ever.

Two brothers, Cain & Abel, were shepherd lads, tending their sheep on the hillsides. But Cain was a wily man and misled his father with a goat's skin – today we still speak of *the mark of Cain*.

Abraham, the old patriarch, obedient to the commands of God, laid Isaac, his only son, on the altar to offer him as a sacrifice only for God to release him at the last moment.

Moses was hidden in the bulrushes and smuggled out to Egypt before leading his people back to their homeland from years of misery and deprivation.

And so the story continues until Jesus, the Son of God, and of men, was born and Christianity was established. Wondrous things were revealed, but all was not plain sailing for the new faith.

Saul of Tarsus was prominent in local society – a hedonist and atheist who delighted in persecuting the early Christians. Then an amazing thing happened. Whilst out walking on the road to Damascus he was struck down with a blinding light. Aided by his companions he struggled into Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit had descended upon him, and he was a changed man. He embraced this new faith.

He changed his name to Paul and became an icon amongst saints. The scriptures are full of accounts of his deeds and example.

So many years have now passed and God continues to shower gifts upon us. The wonders of science and technology, the arts, music, painting, poetry, sculpture and architecture. A wealth to feast on.

Our senses, seeing, hearing, feeling and especially precious, the gift of human love.

A cup of blessing indeed – our cup runneth over.

It is no mischance that the word "adventure" comes from same Latin root as the word "advent" – *ad venire* meaning to come/to approach/to happen. This is the time for our adventure into faith.

As we shoulder our cross and plant our feet into the footsteps of God we pray for the endurance and strength to tread the path.

We are now close, *a cloud of witnesses* travel with us to the very end.

*Come thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee*

*By thy own eternal Spirit,
Rule in all our hearts alone
By thy all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to thy glorious throne*

Our thanks be to God.

The Advent Carol Service From Darkness to Light on Sunday 29th November is based on the ideas in the first part of this article – particularly the emergence of hope for a sinful world.

The Service of Lessons and Carols on Sunday 20th December builds on this and celebrates our Redemption through the birth of our Lord. Both will be candle-lit – do bring your friends!