



## Pastor's Page "Time to Get Ready"

It was Tuesday afternoon and I headed off to Beryl's. As I walked in the small family florists the sweet aroma of fresh flowers greeted me. Despite it being a whole year since I'd been in the shop the lady on duty recognised me and said "Ah, Advent Wreath!" "And what's more she almost got my name right. What a memory! Other family members then went on to tell me that they were celebrating 50 years in business. "That's great" I said, wondering if it was my annual purchase that had kept them solvent! I returned on Friday to pick up my order and begin the countdown to Christmas.

Yes, today is the first Sunday in Advent hence the Advent Crown or wreath. Advent means "*the coming*". The church's year doesn't begin on 1st January but on the first Sunday of Advent, looking forward to Christ's coming. History doesn't tell us what time of year Jesus was born (highly unlikely that it was December) but Roman Christians in the 4th century began to celebrate the Messiah's birth around the winter solstice (shortest day). Taking hold of a pagan festival in honour of a Roman god, Sol Invicatus meaning "unconquerable sun" on 25th December, these Christians shifted the focus from a mythological god to the true deity, the unconquerable Son of God, Jesus the Light of the world. Hence believers (in the west) began to celebrate the birth of Christ just after the winter solstice on 25<sup>th</sup> December. Traditionally during advent the church remembers how the Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of a King, (the Messiah) and the New Testament writers looked forward to the second coming (second Advent) of this very same Lord and King at the conclusion of history. **This is why Advent is primarily a time of preparation.** John the Baptist's mission was to prepare the way for Jesus. He did this by urging the people to get ready for the Christ, pointing away from himself to one greater than he (Jesus) and calling them to repent and be baptised. They had to clean up their act. **The New Testament writers and Jesus himself foretold the second coming of Christ.** We are not given a date, but as surely as He came to earth just over 2000 years ago we can be certain that Jesus will return. The Biblical emphasis with regard to Christ's second coming is one of "being ready" and Advent reminds us of this crucial theme.

A few weeks ago I visited my parents. An important part of my plan was also to call in on my brother's family who only live a couple of miles away. I phoned them first but got no reply. Undaunted I jumped in the car and popped round looking forward to seeing one of my nieces. On arriving I saw a light on so thought "they're in". I rang the bell and waited - nothing. I tried for about 5 minutes but to no avail. Very disappointed I headed back to my parents home. Only a few days later did I discover that Fiona (my brother's youngest daughter) was at home that evening but didn't answer the door because she thought it might be a strange man (how right she was!) I was now doubly disappointed as I was longing to see her. She missed me because she wasn't expecting me.

I don't think many people will miss the fact that Christmas is only just over three weeks away but the Advent question is not, are we ready for Christmas, but are we ready for Christ?

2<sup>nd</sup> December 2007