



Pastor's Page

Light on the Subject

Events this week in Mumbai have reminded us that we live in a dark and troubled world. Understandably the news from India hit me powerfully having just returned from there (albeit many miles from Mumbai) and sampled life in this vibrant sub-continent. The fact that human beings can turn on fellow human beings with such murderous intent and effect proves to me that something has gone badly wrong in our world and in our hearts also.

Against this bleak backdrop we light a candle today signifying the beginning of advent. But are the two things totally incongruous? Does the advent message have anything to say to such a bruised and battered world?

Well firstly, the Advent message carries a note of Expectation. From the days of Abraham onwards the Israelites (Abraham's descendents) had a growing expectation that God was going to send a special person an 'anointed one' to save the nation of Israel. Under God's mighty hand Moses delivered them from slavery in Egypt but this was only a shadow of what was still to come. Isaiah said 'the people walking in darkness have seen a great light' and later on; "For to us a child is born, a son is given" This was understood to be a prophecy regarding the 'anointed one' who is seen as a great light coming into the world. This anointed one is to be named Jesus, his earthly father was told, because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) Advent is the time when we look back with gratitude to the coming of Jesus, and look forward with expectation to his coming again. This season reminds us that there is hope even in the darkest situations because of Jesus.

Advent is also a time of Preparation. Just as Mary prepared herself to have a baby so we must prepare for God's coming. John the Baptist said "Prepare the way for the Lord". Most of us will spend some time preparing for Christmas over the next 4 weeks but will we spend time preparing our hearts for Christ? John says we do this by repenting, turning from our own selfish ways and turning to Jesus for forgiveness. Forgiveness and not revenge is the answer that the world needs to hear as demonstrated by Jesus on the cross as he cried out "Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34) Advent is a good time to fix our eyes and our lives again on Jesus, the saviour of the world.

Finally Advent opens up the way to Reconciliation. – The big message of Advent is "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting men's sins against them" (1 Corinthians 5:19) God in Christ became a human being in order to rescue us from the destructive nature of sin. Christ came down to earth to do the one thing he couldn't do in heaven – die! He died for our sins on the cross and came back to life in order to reconcile us to our creator and heavenly Father. So the answer to the hatred in the world and the hatred in men's hearts (as manifested in Mumbai last week) is the love of Christ.

So as we light the first candle of advent today we can say with confidence; "Arise, shine your light has come – Jesus the light of the world has come" And here lies the hope for Mumbai, mankind, and the whole world.

30th November 2008