



Pastor's Page

An Ever-Present Question

So there I was happily wrapping Christmas presents singing 'Ding dong merrily on high' (quietly!) when I suddenly became aware of a tidal wave of liquid seeping across the table. Grabbing the parcels that I'd already wrapped I lifted them off the table to discover that I'd knocked a paper cup full of "Tetleys" (or it may have been fair-trade) Tea all over the working surface. And... not only had it baptised my presents it was starting to impact everyone else's! This was Friday evening at Birmingham city mission where I was making a unique contribution to the parcel wrapping activity. Well I have to say I managed to retrieve the situation pretty well but it seemed to me that it was the question that I just been asked that caused this unfortunate incident (couldn't have been my fault!!) And the question was; "Have you finished your Christmas shopping yet?!"

(I think you know the answer!!!) But I have to say I have lost count already of the times that people have asked me a related question which I never quite know how to answer namely "Are you ready for Christmas?"

Well today is the third Sunday in Advent and 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 Invicata 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 25th 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. 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.

On Friday morning (before the tea incident!) I had a visit from a man and his six year old daughter from South Korea. They used to be neighbours of mine and were in Birmingham for his degree graduation ceremony at the University. I was so touched that they made the effort to come and see me. The little girl wanted me to sing 'Wind the bobbin up'! 6,000 miles just to hear 'Wind the bobbin up!' Jesus came all the way from heaven to earth for you and me because he loves us and to rescue us from the deadly effects of sin. So I guess there's only one way to be truly ready for Christmas and that's to be ready for Christ?

13th December 2009