

BISHOP'S BULLETIN No 30

To the Licensed Clergy of Peterborough Diocese

7 December 2020



Dear friends

I love the Advent collects. The first three in particular are powerful theological prayers (the third was written by John Cosin for the 1662 revision of the Prayer Book, and the first two of course by Thomas Cranmer over a century before). A long time ago (when I was a boy) churches used to encourage their people, even their children, to learn by heart the collect of the week, and pray it at home. That is good church discipline, good disciple-making, even good Anglicanism!

I love Advent – and how appropriate its themes are as we continue with a fairly high degree of lockdown, and confusion and delays on vaccines (and on trade deals!) Advent is both a penitential season, and a time to speak of hope and joy. It brings together the brokenness of this world and our lives, with the joy of God's promises and the hope of redemption. At present that is mirrored with the horror of covid-19, over sixty thousand deaths in Britain so far; then the joy of scientific advance in creating vaccines, and the hope of their eventual deployment and the end of this scourge.

I know we have to prepare for Christmas, and be doing Christmas things this week and next, but please don't let that necessary stuff get in the way of the real nature of the Advent season. Last week I heard a fellow bishop fall into the trap of describing Advent as a time of preparing for the coming of Jesus ... at Christmas. Oh dear! Yes, the incarnation is important. Christmas does matter. But Advent is about so much more. It may be about Christ's first coming, but it is about his second coming too. It may be about the excitement of shepherds and angels, but it is also about the final angel-assisted ingathering of all God's people. It may be about God's kingdom coming here and now, but it is also about the perfection of the new heaven and the new earth. It may be about our penitential struggles in this life, but it is also about our ultimate and certain hope of full redemption. It is so much bigger, and about so much more, than Christmas.

Sermon over! Continued blessings for Advent, our great season of hope.

With love in Christ

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