

ADVENT 2 2025

I share with you the second of Coventry Diocese's 'tiny Advent poems' inside your E-News: the four Sundays of Advent are described as "jigsaw bits still scattered, but you've pieced together the frame: ground and sky."

I have never really enjoyed jigsaws but I do know you have to find those corners that make up the frame to really get started. And inside that picture today of the Jesse tree, we recall those great words of Isaiah in our first reading, and that wonderful vision of the kind of Messiah we should expect, and trust and believe in: 'Kings will keep silence before you for whom the nations long: come and save us and delay no longer.'

One of the high spots in the people of God's story was the reign of David, son of Jesse, flawed though he was: adultery and murder were hardly the best qualifications for being singled out as a great leader. The history of God's people had its ups and downs, but, in David's reign, the people became more securely established in their land, and subsequent generations looked back to his time as a golden age, a foretaste of what would happen when God came to save his people from oppression. This hope became focussed on the Messiah, who would come from David's line, and filled with God's Spirit would establish peace and justice on the earth. The prophets, speaking often against a background of despair, spoke of a new age, when God's covenanted relationship with his people would be renewed but it would

require a change of heart on the people's part – a renewal associated with judgement.

We are reminded by today's antiphon that longing for God's kingdom to come is not a nostalgic longing for the return of a golden age. Perhaps there never was one. It's easy to think that things were better in years gone by, and wish we could return to that state. Think of this description of society:

“The world is passing through troubled times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they knew everything, and what passes as wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for the girls, they are foolish and immoderate in speech, behaviour and dress.”

If that sounds familiar, it is salutary to realize that it was written by Peter the Monk in 1274.

We can't cling on to the past, real or imagined, as though that were the only way to stay close to God. 'As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be' is part of a statement about the appropriateness of giving glory to God, not a formula for keeping things as they have always been.

Tradition is something that evolves to meet the demands of the current context. It must never be allowed to become a straitjacket that prevents us from engaging with the real world. That's true of ways of worship, as well as in other areas of life. We can commit idolatry by clinging on to old familiar ways of worship just as much as by making our own

version of God. Lucy Winkett, referring to Evensong in St Paul's Cathedral where she was a Precentor for a time, commented that it is sometimes a little difficult to resist the feeling that we are in some kind of ecclesiastical version of the Sealed Knot Society, re-enacting events from the 17th century for our own enjoyment. Controversial I know!

Advent challenges us, though, to look at how God has dealt faithfully with us in our personal and corporate lives, often bringing positive good out of unpromising situations, and to respond in thanksgiving, using that recognition to deepen our trust in God whose desire is always our good, to look for ways in which God is at work now, and to have the courage to change in order to co-operate with him. As God was in the beginning, God is now, and always will be, and God is worthy of our trust.

Ponder and pray with Isaiah then that what God intends for his creation is our rootedness in being co-creators for a new world of peace and goodwill... "The wolf shall live with the lamb" and (unlike most of David Attenborough's wildlife films), "the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." Come and save us, do not delay!

Ponder and pray for our local charities as the little children in their cancer wards open up their new gifts and the refugees far from home are surprised and encouraged too, that they are welcome to live alongside us in our temporary country or home. Our Advent jigsaw is never quite as neat or tidy or

easy as we might think, but we can still thank God for his continuing, faithful love. He cares for all and never lets us go.