



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

The first Sunday of Advent

Sunday 30th November 2025

Romans 13. 11-end

Matthew 24. 36-44

Chris Burke

Archdeacon of Barking

“Therefore you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Mtw 24. 44

If, like me, you are the kind of person who likes to work to a deadline then you probably find yourself leaving things until the point that they need to be dealt with and then there is a flurry of activity leading up to the deadline. I give something my absolute attention when I know that the deadline is looming, but in the run up to that I may be distracted by dealing with other things – many of which have their own even earlier deadline. I was never the student who finished their essays early.

It seems to me that the planning that goes into our Christmas celebrations starts earlier with each passing year. Decorations seem to go up some time in October or November and plans are made for the Christmas celebrations months ahead, with food ordered and arrangements made months in advance. We seem to get the first pre-Christmas advertising not long after the summer holidays.

As we are preparing for the celebration of Christmas, when Jesus was born over 2000 years ago, we can easily lose sight of the full significance of the great season of Advent.

When thinking about the time when Jesus comes again we could very easily see that as something in the long-term future. Perhaps something we will deal with when we get a little nearer and things seem somehow to be a little more urgent. The challenge in such a situation is to lose the sense of urgency and vigilance and for that to be seen as something which can be addressed later.

In the Gospel reading for today Jesus reminds his disciples of the importance of vigilance and being ready, not just because we don't know when things are likely to happen, but also because it encourages active discipleship and shared community action in the present. When we are making things ready we are engaged in an active process of transformation.

When we gather in our churches for worship Sunday after Sunday we do so expecting to encounter Jesus, both in word and sacrament. We gather expecting that we shall be renewed, refreshed and transformed through that encounter. Our worship forms a key part of our remaining open to Jesus day by day, week by week, it can be an important expression of our shared readiness and our worship and liturgy is filled with references to hope and expectation.

I once worked in a church where we recognised that many people were coming to church, meeting their friends, doing familiar activities, but seemed not to expect anything much to happen that might challenge or change them as individual disciples during the course of the liturgy.

We worked hard to raise the sense of expectation as people gathered for worship, to make it our clear intention that as they came to church to meet each other, they would especially focus on how they were going to meet with Jesus that day.

Jesus's invitation to be ready invites each of us to renew our own approach to discipleship, and particularly to see generous and intentional discipleship as something which we should not put off or delay until later.

The season of Advent, which begins as we gather for worship this morning, is often thought of as the preparation period leading up to Christmas. Not least by those who open an advent calendar window each morning. Whilst in practical terms that may well be the way people approach those first few weeks in December, it is not the real reason for the season. For Advent is not so much a preparation time for Christmas as it is a preparation for eternity.

The traditional themes for Advent invite us to reflect on Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell, but not in a way which is gloomy and pessimistic, rather as a powerful reminder to us of the invitation we share to know God's love and grace and to live as disciples reflecting such love and grace in our own lives.

My appeal to you this Advent season is to make sure that you make at least some time available to focus on the kind of readiness Jesus invites us to share in. To make time for prayer, for reflection and for remembering that the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

May you each have a Holy Advent!

Amen