

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3,  
2017. ADVENT SUNDAY. FIRST IN A SERIES OF FOUR SERMONS BASED ON  
CANDLES IN THE ADVENT WREATH.**

**(Taken from this Sunday's Pew Sheet)** THE ADVENT WREATH is a Christian tradition that symbolises the passage of the four weeks of the season of Advent. It is a wreath usually made from evergreens, with four violet coloured candles. Beginning with the First Sunday of Advent, the lighting of a candle can be accompanied by a Bible reading, devotional time and prayers. An additional candle is lit during each subsequent week. Each candle represents an aspect of the spiritual preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. By the last Sunday before Christmas, all four candles are lit. Many Advent wreaths include a fifth, Christ candle which is lit on Christmas Day. The custom is observed both in family settings and at public church services.

There is no set meaning for each candle. For some congregations the candles represent the virtues of the Christian faith – Hope, Love, Joy and Peace. For others the candles represent the Prophecy Candle, Bethlehem Candle, Shepherds' Candle, and Angels' Candle. At St Andrew's this year the candles will represent for us the Waiting Candle; the Prophecy Candle; the John the Baptist Candle; the Mary Candle.

**SERMON**

How are you at waiting? It's a funny experience ... .. to wait. Different people use waiting time in different ways. There's the "resigned inactivity" of waiting. The bus will come eventually. There's nothing you can do about it. Waiting ... waiting ... waiting. It's a "nothing time." Waiting ... waiting ... waiting. Then there's the "catching up on things" use of waiting – to read a book; to read the paper; to check our phones. People who do such things as these have however long it will take for the bus to arrive so they had might as well use the time to good advantage. Also there's the "busy preparation time" of waiting. When a pregnant woman is waiting for the birth of her child, she is busy. There are thing to do, a nursery to prepare, exercises to do, scans to have, classes to go to– and she knows there are only 9 months to get all these things done. It's a time of preparation. And then there's the "waiting time of doom." Waiting in the dentist's waiting room to be called into the chair for ***that*** procedure. Waiting outside the Principal's office for ***that*** dressing-down and criticism.

How are you at waiting?

Today we start the church's season of Advent – waiting for the coming of Christ both at Christmas, as well as at the end of time. Each Sunday between now and Christmas Eve we shall light another candle on the Advent Wreath, and remind ourselves that the time for waiting is getting shorter and shorter. The first candle that we lit this morning is the "Waiting Candle."

In the past couple of weeks our Gospel readings have consisted two of Jesus' parables that have talked about waiting. There was the parable of the unwise bridesmaids who did not bother to provide extra fuel for their lamps – inactivity in waiting. There was the parable of the servant who was given one talent and hid it in the ground – inactivity in

waiting, contrasted with the five- and the two-talent servants who used waiting as a time of active preparation.

The first Christians believed that the return of Christ was imminent – it would happen any moment now. In fact, St Paul had to deal with the problem caused by people who were so convinced that Christ's return would be very soon, that they refused to work. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 he wrote, "If any one will not work, let him not eat." On the positive side, these non-working people had a sense of urgency about their waiting for the return of Christ. But on the negative side, their non-participation in the normal day-to-day activities of work and production and reward was complete presumption on the goodness and generosity of their fellow believers.

On the whole, we in the twenty first century have lost a sense of urgency about the return of Christ and the installation of the kingdom of God. We have seen so many Advents ... we are getting older and older ... we have seen it all before. It's almost as though there is a weariness that sets in about the whole thing. Yes, we're waiting ... but yes, we're ***still*** waiting. It's another year

Yet, each week in the Nicene Creed we affirm vocally our belief in the return of Christ. "***He will come again in glory*** to judge the living and the dead; and his kingdom will have no end." Each week when we proclaim the mystery of faith, we say, "Christ has died ... Christ is risen ... ***Christ will come again.***" The theme of Advent is an important part of our Christian belief.

Waiting ... waiting ... waiting. Maybe we should re-state that and say "Preparing ... preparing ... preparing." Perhaps it will be true for us that we shall ***not*** see whatever it is that Christ's return will bring with it. Rather we shall go to meet Christ through the gateway of physical death, whenever that will happen for us. Whichever way it happens, we need to be preparing ... preparing ... preparing.

How do we do that preparation? There are several aspects to this preparation. First of all we prepare ourselves ***congregationally***. Everything that happens in our Communion services between now and Christmas prepares us for the coming of Christ. Those who put our Prayer Book together have given us special scripture sentences, special preface to the Thanksgiving Prayer. Those who put our Bible Readings together in the lectionary have given us readings that point to the themes of Advent. The hymns and music we have, are especially chosen with Advent in mind. The Advent Candle lighting ceremony we shall have at the start of each service points us to an aspect of Advent. The things that Helen and I shall say in our sermons also have Advent as their focus. ***Congregationally***, we prepare for Advent.

***Personally***, we can prepare for Advent also. In the Pew Sheets between now and Christmas Day we shall give the references for the Gospel Readings at Holy Communion for each day of the week. You may care to find these readings in your Bible at home and read them carefully each day, and work out what they have to say to you. You could take the Prayer of the Day in the Pew Sheet and make it a part of your daily prayers. Coming here to St Andrew's Sunday by Sunday could also be an important part of your own preparation for Advent and Christmas. We can prepare ***personally***.

And we can prepared *communally*. Not everything that department stores and TV advertisers do about Christmas is necessarily bad. Certainly some of it is crass and superficial. But at least the festival of Christmas is in people's attention. And whenever Christmas is spelled in the full way, rather than "X"-mas, even then the name of Christ is being made public. I am heartened by the number of people I hear who are sick and tired of being told that we have to say "Happy Holidays" rather than "Happy or Merry Christmas." In our community there seems to be a backlash against this version of political correctness. Let us be "Merry **Christmas**" wishers. Maybe we can attend some carols event in a park or at a Town Hall or wherever Christmas Carols are presented as part of our *communal* preparation.

Waiting ... resigned inactivity ...catching up on things while we wait ... preparation. As we wait for Christ – both at Christmas and at the coming of God's kingdom, let us be waiting ... waiting ... waiting ... preparing ... preparing ... preparing.