

## ADVENT

Welcome to the holy season of ADVENT. It is the season of preparation for Christmas. The word means 'arrival' and in the Church it's used particularly for the arrival of Jesus Emmanuel, 'God with us'.

There's a haunting Advent song which develops this theme. Its opening lines go:

O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

This song plays with the longing expressed by an ancient Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, concerning his people. They were in detention after a terrible defeat. His yearning was for his people to return to their homeland and to control over their own destiny. The hymn writer was picking up this sense of desire for the liberty of the people of God. Who yearn for justice, peace and righteousness to prevail.

It's a good Advent song because this is the Church season that encourages us to rediscover our YEARNING.

A good description of yearning is 'your heart's desire'.

As we mature we often lose that sense of yearning that children manage so well. Through often bitter experience we can develop a more 'realistic' (read 'pessimistic') sense of the future. We learn not to expect too much in case we are disappointed. Unlike children who expect to be amazed and delighted about what the future will bring - the presents under the tree, going to high school, having a career, growing up - we can forget our heart's desire and settle for much less.



Norman Rockwell's great Christmas picture  
on discovering who Santa really is.

This is the season to be encouraged to yearn a little more. You have permission to dream and hope for what might seem beyond your grasp.

As a community service organisation - we can reclaim our burning desire to create a more caring and just society. One where the vulnerable are protected, young people are empowered and encouraged, the disadvantaged given access to more opportunities. Where justice and peace are part of the fabric of our society.

What do you yearn for as an individual? It might be for peace at home, more confidence in your dealings with others, the respect of your colleagues or some real appreciation from your boss. It might be to be more successful as a human being, a parent, a spouse.

In Advent we're encouraged to yearn. To wait with expectation for our heart's desire and maybe take a few small steps towards realising it.

The assurance from the Christian story is that it is not impossible to achieve your heart's desire. Certainly for human love and life's fulfilment. Even for the bigger things such as justice and liberation from oppression. Emmanuel, God with us, is there to remind us that the Creator of all things holds us close. That God's yearning, the holy heart's desire, is to bring us to life and life in abundance. Not just us, but every person, everywhere.

Fairly lofty talk, but it fits for Advent. Why not spend a little time today yearning? Remembering your heart's desire?

This reflection was prepared by my brother Chaplain Fr Mark McCracken from Anglicare WA. I thought it was so good I should share it with you.

Advent Blessings  
Fr Peter