

Dear Friends

Well, here we are in the first week of Advent. It's about this new season in the church calendar that I really want to write to you but it would be remiss of me not to say a word about the emergence of a new strain in the Covid pandemic and to ask for your prayers for all whose lives have been, and will be, disrupted by the Omicron variant.

And so to Advent, not only a new season but the beginning of a new liturgical year when we shall be exploring the life and ministry of Jesus through the lens of Luke's gospel. This gospel is an extraordinarily political one. Over and over, the writer mentions the names of people in power, referencing their eras, areas of governance and even some of their policies. Even a casual acquaintance with the gospel texts brings some familiarity with the complicated dynamics of conflict in the politics of the day. Names such as Herod, Pilate, Judea, Pharisees, Scribes, Samaria, Syrophonicia, Gentile, Rome, all trip off the tongue. To read the text of Luke's gospel is to be drawn to read the text of our own days — where political realities influence the everyday.

As you know, Advent means 'coming' or 'arrival' and this is a period when we are preparing for two comings: God coming to earth in the infant Jesus whom we await again at Christmas and Christ returning to earth, at a time we do not know, as Charles Wesley describes in his famous hymn:

*Lo! he comes with clouds descending,  
Once for favoured sinners slain;  
Thousand thousand saints attending  
Swell the triumph of his train:  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!  
God appears, on earth to reign.*

Many of you will already have Advent calendars of one kind or another. I want to offer you another one, although unfortunately it doesn't contain chocolate or gifts behind closed windows or doors! This one is in the form of a poem written by Rowan Williams, the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury, and entitled Advent Calendar:

*He will come like last leaf's fall.*

*One night when the November wind  
has flayed the trees to bone, and earth  
wakes choking on the mould,  
the soft shroud's folding.*

*He will come like frost.  
One morning when the shrinking earth  
opens on mist, to find itself  
arrested in the net  
of alien, sword-set beauty.*

*He will come like dark.  
One evening when the bursting red  
December sun draws up the sheet  
and penny-masks its eye to yield  
the star-snowed fields of sky.*

*He will come, will come,  
will come like crying in the night,  
like blood, like breaking,  
as the earth writhes to toss him free.  
He will come like child.*

Blessings  
Allan

(Rev. J. Allan Taylor)