



### **Preparing to Welcome Christ**

St Paul gave voice to a wonderful prayer in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus (Ephesians 3 16-22). From the depth of his heart he prayed that Christ would find a place in our hearts and that through the power of the Spirit, we might be filled with the utter fullness of God. In that way we might discover the height and length, the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge

Advent is a timely reminder of 'the utter fullness of God', of Immanuel – God is with us. The prophet Isaiah tells us that when the birth of the Messiah was announced to King Ahaz, he is told: "A virgin will give birth to a son whom she shall call Immanuel" - a name which means "God-is-with-us". At this time each year we are invited to reflect once again on the extraordinary gift that God chose to become one of us in Jesus. Each year Advent asks us the question, how will you welcome Christ into your homes, into your lives this year? That is not a one-off event – welcoming Christ is a daily invitation, a continuing challenge.

Advent gives us precious time to prepare to celebrate Immanuel, to become more aware that God is present and active in our world. It is easy to focus on what we see as going wrong, on where we disagree or where we find fault, to be prophets of doom. It is harder to look for the positive, the signs of God's loving presence and activity in our world. Christmas doesn't promise heaven on earth nor does it rid the world of sickness and war – there will still be hurt and wrongdoing. But at this time we are asked to refocus on what the coming of Christ means – that right here and now God is present in our lives.

Advent is a time to look at what is right in our world, what is right in our lives, our families, in our parish, our church, our local community. And to give thanks for it.

When we sense that God-is-with-us we can refocus on what is good in the world – as Jesus asked the Pharisees and Scribes who came to test him, to ask for a sign that was already there if only they would look. In this Season of Advent, take some time to ponder what is 'right' in our lives. Be open to God's presence, God's invitation in our lives. "Fear not" is one of the most commonly found expressions in the bible – eighty one times in fact. When we look at the generosity of others, the way some people can bear their pain and suffering with such courage and hope, when we look at the joy and happiness of children, the untiring efforts of those who work to bring peace and justice, of those who work so tirelessly in our community or in our local church and so the list goes on. In that way, we can see that it is time for us to give up

selfishness, bitterness, or jealousy. We can discover that we no longer have to endure alone our pain. When we look at what is right around us, we can find the courage to reach out to those with whom we may disagree or at least to try to find some common ground. So, be open to God, open our hearts so that Christ will find a place there - be open to be surprised, to be filled with happiness.

During this season, the lighting of the candles in the Advent wreath is a vivid sign of hope. To light an Advent candle is to say that we believe that God is still alive, that God still loves this world, that Jesus is risen and that we have been redeemed. The Advent candles are invitations to seek out and find God's presence in our lives and in our world –to be grateful for the blessings we have received...those blessings enrich our lives with the challenges they offer us.

**Jim Quillinan**