

Sunday 30 November 2025, Advent Sunday Parish Eucharist *and* Choral Matins

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Today, the first Sunday of Advent, marks the beginning of a new Church year. Since about the year 380AD the Church has marked a season of preparation before Christmas during which we reflect on the return of Christ. Thus we begin our year at the end; we celebrate the end of the story of Jesus before marking its beginning with his birth. As the world around us covers itself in lights and stuffs itself with chocolate, the Church calls for penitence and reflection on the Last Judgment. It's quite the contrast. But I think it's good to start at the end because when you have a clear idea of where you're going, you can plan your journey well. If we begin our year by celebrating the return of Jesus Christ, we can live our year mindful of that return. And if we're confident in the end of history, we can place ourselves and our lives properly in that history and view everything around us with better perspective.

Do you look forward to the return of Christ? Perhaps you've never asked yourself the question, so take a moment to consider it. Do you look forward to the return of Christ? I do. I mean, I really do. I'd like to tell you why, and I'm going to use a hymn which we will sing later in the service to do it.

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

I look forward to the return of Jesus Christ because when he comes he will establish his kingdom on earth forever. All the wars, and poverty, and tribal hatreds that tear countries apart and tear people down will be destroyed. As St John says in Revelation 21: 'I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.' The former things- death, pain, crying, injustice, violence, deception, hunger, abuse- the former things will pass away when Jesus Christ returns. The whole earth will be his kingdom.

*Every eye shall now behold him,
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at nought and sold him,
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,
Deeply wailing Shall the true Messiah see.*

I look forward to the return of Jesus Christ because when he comes he will vindicate the belief of the faithful. Sometimes it is hard to believe in the love of Jesus, and there are so many in this world who benefit from unbelief. They crucify Christ all over again –piercing and nailing him to the tree- as they concoct schemes to steal money from the vulnerable, to build weapons of war to invade other nations, to deprive the innocent of justice, to shame the widow, the orphan, and the refugee. Those who hate their fellow man and seek to dominate, to humiliate, and to degrade others simply to get more wealth or power for themselves put Christ on the cross a second time. But St John reminds us: 'Blessed are they that do [God's] commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the [heavenly] city. [But outside in the darkness] are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.'

*Those dear tokens of his passion
Still his dazzling body bears,
Cause of endless exultation
To his ransomed worshipers;
With what rapture Gaze we on those glorious scars.*

I look forward to the return of Jesus Christ because when he comes I will see him in his resurrection body and, like St Thomas who doubted and then believed, will touch the very wounds that purchased my salvation. Oh, my friends, how I long to be with the Lord Jesus. How I long to hear the voice of the one who always says, 'I love you' and never anything hurtful. How I long to look into those eyes which never looked on me with cruelty or disgust or derision. How I long to feel the touch of his beautiful hands, hands that never touched but to heal and to restore to life. How I long to be held by him, because I am often so tired of holding myself together. 'I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely', St John writes. 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.' And St John, the apostle who rested on Jesus' own breast at the Last Supper, also writes, 'They shall see his face.'

*Yea! Amen! let all adore thee
High on thine eternal throne!
Saviour, take the power and glory,
Claim the kingdom for thine own.
O come quickly! Alleluia! Come, Lord, come.*

Finally, I look forward to the return of Jesus Christ because when he comes it will not be the end, but rather the beginning: the beginning of Real Life of which this world and all its light and colour is but a dim shadow. Another word from St John: '*And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works... And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire... And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*' It's a sobering image, the Judgment Seat of God. But judgment is nothing to be afraid of if we have loved and served the judge. It is Christ himself who judges and he judges justly as one who searches the heart. Death and hell will be cast into the lake of fire and new life begins. '*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*' A new Jerusalem, Jerusalem representing the place where God's glory dwells, comes down to earth. Heaven and earth conjoined and conjubilant in new, abundant, magnificent Real Life.

I look forward to the return of Jesus Christ because when he comes Life will be as it should be, as we know it should be, as our hearts so deeply and desperately long for it to be. All that should not be will be burned up and all that remains will be purified as the dwelling-place of the glory of God. We who believe will dwell in his glorious presence and truly Live as we have never lived before! In Advent we begin our Church year with the end so that we can understand ourselves in the light of what is to come. We begin with Real and Blessed Life given at the return of Jesus Christ so that we can endure with patient expectation for another year, even until he comes.

*O come quickly!
O come quickly!
O come quickly!
Alleluia! Come, Lord, come. Amen.*