

Reflection at Advent Evening Service

Sunday 27 November 2022

by Rev. Alan Stewart

Darkness and light



As the long nights advance, it's no coincidence that Advent happens in this, the darkest time of the year. And one of the great themes of Advent, of course, is the light that shines in the darkness. Often, we associate darkness with things that go bump in the night; with fear or evil, with confusion or pain, perhaps. And we can all think of 'dark' periods of our lives when we've felt lost or fearful, helpless or hopeless, when we were oblivious to any light in that particular darkness.

Tonight, we affirm that even when we cannot see it, the Light of Christ is with us through the dark nights of winter and the dark nights of our lives.

Actual darkness, of course, is not to be feared, it's good and necessary. There are things we can only see in the dark, like stars and fireworks, like candlelight. Some creatures are most productive in the dark. Some things only grow in the dark. Some things can only be learnt in the dark.

Sometimes it's only when we cannot see that we begin to hear. And when we can't see what's ahead, we can learn how to trust. When we're afraid, we can discover a new courage. When we walk through dark places, a new empathy can arise for those who walk in their own dark places.

In darkness, we have the freedom not to be seen, to withdraw, to encounter God and our deepest selves. The dark dissolves our bright illusions of independence. It reminds us to reach out and feel God's hand, already in ours.

In darkness, the world rests. As the trees shed their leaves, so we can shed what we no longer need to carry. And as the rotting leaves nourish the germinating seeds, we can allow God to nourish our dreams until they are ready to grow into reality.

I imagine most of us will have experienced that moment in the theatre when the lights are turned off and everything goes quiet, until the lights come back up and the curtain lifts. Someone has said that Advent is like the hush in the theatre between the lights going down and the curtain coming up for Christmas. And I really like that.

During these next four weeks, we take moments to be still, to wait in the expectation of the hush, so that we can truly appreciate the magic of what's to come.

In Advent, we try to make time and space to quieten the noise around us and within us; to create that hush in the dark where we can learn to listen to what's really going on inside us, and to listen for that quiet reassurance of God.

In Advent, Christ invites us to put our trust in him and to walk through the dark carrying a light that never goes out.