

Sermon on Sunday 14 November

(8am service)

by Rev. Bill Church

"Furnished for so great a guest"

There are not many specifically Advent hymns (and we don't sing them at 8 o'clock, anyway), but among the best is '*On Jordan's bank*', which includes the lines: "Then cleansed be every Christian breast and furnished for so great a guest". The words in the St Andrew's hymn book are a bit different but make the same point.

And in the Advent Collect, we find the words: "Who came to visit us in great humility."

We are more used to thinking of ourselves as guests in God's world, but here we are invited to see the Christ child as our guest.

And we know what looking forward to the arrival of a human guest can be like.

There is joy and anticipation. We think through what we will talk about. What news are we going to share? What happiness and sorrow, what success and failure, what hopes and problems?

With human guests, there may be things we think we should not talk about. With our divine guest, everything should be on the table.

And there is preparation and worry about preparation. Is the house warm enough for them? Which bedroom would suit them best? What food would they enjoy? And which food will they not eat? How will they cope with the dog/cat/children/traffic? Are we going to organise something to do, or will they have their own list? Etc etc.

The danger is that we get so exhausted, physically and emotionally, preparing for the visit that we cannot really enjoy it when it happens; so anxious about the details that we miss the purpose of the visit.

Christmas can certainly get like that, what with cards and catering and all the excellent cultural, musical and social events which crowd in around us at this time of year.

Don't be a hermit, don't be a Scrooge, but do make space for the quiet enjoyment of our great visitor.

