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A PASTORAL REFLECTION FOR THE SEASON OF ADVENT 2026

Theme: Advent – Preparing for Christ, Living in Expectation

1. Understanding Advent: Origin and meaning

The word *Advent* comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming" or "arrival". It refers both to the coming of Jesus Christ into the world through his birth and to his promised return at the end of time.

Advent marks the beginning of the Western Church's liturgical year. Its historical development took place gradually during the fourth to sixth centuries. Following the establishment of Christmas on 25 December in the fourth century, Christians began observing periods of spiritual preparation before the celebration of Christ's birth.

In parts of Gaul and Spain, this preparation sometimes lasted approximately forty days and included fasting and penitential practices. It was sometimes called *St Martin's Lent*, beginning around 11 November. Rome subsequently developed its own Advent observance, and the four-Sunday structure gradually became established in the Western Church.

Advent is therefore much more than a countdown to Christmas. Its purpose is to direct our attention towards Christ's incarnation, his continuing presence among us and his promised return.

As Philip H. Pfatteicher explains in *Journey into the Heart of God: Living the Liturgical Year* (2013), Advent directs the Church towards God's promised future, rather than focusing exclusively on remembering a past event.

2. The length and structure of Advent 2026

Advent consists of four Sundays before Christmas. It begins on the Sunday nearest to 30 November and concludes on 24 December.

In 2026, the Sundays are:

- First Sunday: 29 November
- Second Sunday: 6 December
- Third Sunday: 13 December
- Fourth Sunday: 20 December

Purple or violet is traditionally used as the liturgical colour, representing preparation, reflection, and penitence. Some Anglican traditions use blue to express hope and expectation. Rose may be used on the Third Sunday, traditionally called Gaudete Sunday.

The Advent wreath, with its four candles, is a nineteenth-century German devotional practice that has become widely accepted in Western Christianity. The candles are commonly associated with hope, peace, joy, and love, although these interpretations are not universally prescribed.

3. The central theological message

Advent holds together two important Christian convictions: Christ has come, and Christ will come again.

The first coming refers to the incarnation when God entered human history in Jesus Christ. John 1:14 declares: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

The incarnation affirms that God enters human experience, including its vulnerability, suffering, and difficulties.

The second coming refers to Christ's promised return and the fulfilment of God's purposes for creation (Matthew 24:36–44; Acts 1:9–11; Revelation 21:1–5).

The Church lives between these two events. We remember what God has accomplished through Christ and await what God has promised to complete.

This expectation is not an invitation to speculate about dates or predict the end of the world. It is a call to responsible Christian living. The question Advent places before us is simple: **If we await Christ's coming, how should we be living today?**

4. Principal biblical themes

Four major themes shape our understanding of Advent:

Hope and God's promises

Isaiah 2:1–5; 9:2–7; 11:1–10.

The prophets speak of God's intention to establish justice, peace, and reconciliation. Advent hope does not require us to ignore present suffering. Rather, it gives us the courage and responsibility to address poverty, violence, inequality, and division.

Watchfulness and readiness

Matthew 24:36–44; Mark 13:24–37.

Jesus calls his followers to remain spiritually prepared. Readiness is expressed through responsible decisions, honest relationships, faithful service, and accountability before God.

Repentance and changed lives

Matthew 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–8.

John the Baptist calls people to repentance. The Greek word *metanoia* describes a change of mind and direction. Genuine repentance must produce visible changes in behaviour, relationships, and conduct.

Faithful obedience and the coming Kingdom

Luke 1:26–56.

Mary's response to God's call demonstrates trust and obedience despite uncertainty. Her song, the Magnificat, also reminds us that God's purposes include lifting the lowly, feeding the hungry and challenging unjust structures.

These themes show that Advent is not simply about preparing for a celebration. It concerns the way we understand and practise Christian discipleship.

5. Advent and our responsibilities as Christians

The meaning of Advent must become evident in our everyday lives. I encourage our congregations to pay attention to five responsibilities:

1. **Spiritual renewal:** Make time for prayer, Scripture, worship, and honest self-examination.
2. **Healthy relationships:** Address unresolved disagreements, gossip, resentment, and destructive behaviour. Pursue reconciliation where possible, without compromising truth or accountability.
3. **Pastoral care:** Remember people experiencing bereavement, loneliness, unemployment, illness, and financial hardship, particularly during the Christmas period.
4. **Responsible conduct:** Exercise authority honestly, manage resources faithfully and remain accountable for the responsibilities entrusted to us.
5. **Christian mission:** Put our faith into action through proclamation, discipleship, compassionate service, justice, reconciliation, and care for creation, as expressed in the Five Marks of Mission.

6. Advent and the Diocese of George

As we approach the end of 2026, Advent offers our Diocese an opportunity to assess our ministry and prepare responsibly for 2027.

Our geographical size and diversity require cooperation, shared responsibility, and commitment to our common mission. We must not allow personal interests, disagreements, or competing preferences to undermine our diocesan unity.

I encourage our clergy, parish councils, churchwardens, ministry organisations, and congregations to concentrate on three priorities:

- **Spiritual and ministerial growth:** Strengthen worship, discipleship, Christian formation, and pastoral care.
- **Unity and cooperation:** Respect our respective responsibilities, address disagreements constructively and work together for the good of the Diocese.
- **Mission and responsible stewardship:** Continue moving from maintenance to mission, ensuring that our buildings, finances, structures, and resources support the proclamation of the Gospel and practical service to our communities.

We must also remember that the needs of people do not disappear during Christmas. Our pastoral responsibilities must include those who are struggling, isolated or vulnerable.

7. Conclusion

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we enter Advent 2026, I encourage you to observe this season with an appreciation of its full biblical and theological significance.

Let us prepare ourselves spiritually, examine our conduct, strengthen our relationships, and remain attentive to the needs of others.

We celebrate Christ who came among us, serve Christ who is present with us, and await Christ who has promised to come again.

As the Book of Revelation reminds us:

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

May this Advent be a time when our faith becomes more evident in our decisions, relationships, and service. May God grant our Diocese wisdom in leadership, commitment in ministry, generosity in service and unity in our common life.

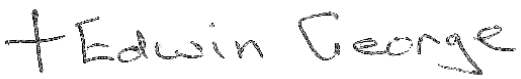
I wish you, your families, our clergy and all our congregations a meaningful and spiritually enriching Advent season.

May we prepare not only to celebrate the birth of Christ, but also to live faithfully as people who belong to him.

Ordination
We continue to pray for The Reverend Mr. Shaun Plato who will be ordained to the Order of Priesthood and Mr. Sinokuhle Rungqu and Ms. Jane Phillips who will be ordained to the Order of Deacon on Sunday, 06 December 2026 at the Cathedral Church of St Mark the Evangelist @ 2pm.

Seminary
We also pray for those entering seminary formation in 2027, particularly for Ms. Pamela Blauw and Mr. Vincent Pye. Ms. Blauw and Mr. Pye will be joining Mr. George Petersen as a returning student.

With every blessing



The Right Reverend Edwin Desmond Pockpass
BISHOP OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH
GEORGE DIOCESE

References

1. Pfatteicher, Philip H. (2013). *Journey into the Heart of God: Living the Liturgical Year*. Oxford University Press.
2. Church of England. *Common Worship: Seasonal Material – Advent*.
3. Dowden, John. *The Church Year and Calendar*. Cambridge Handbooks of Liturgical Study.
4. The Holy Bible: Isaiah 2:1–5; Matthew 3:1–12; Matthew 24:36–44; Luke 1:26–56; John 1:14; Acts 1:9–11; Revelation 21:1–5; 22:20.