



Christmas 2008

The Meaning of Advent, by Liz Clark

Advent is definitely my favourite season in the Church's year, with its inspiring message of 'waiting in joyful hope' for the Lord to come to us again. It seems to come at just the right time too. As I look around me, the trees are just about bare, the days are growing ever shorter, and everything in nature seems dead and dark. That's just about how I feel too - and as I struggle to get out of bed on these dark mornings I have to fight the temptation simply to curl up and hibernate like a dormouse until the spring comes!

But then we arrive at the First Sunday of Advent, and as the first candle is lit on the Advent wreath, to be joined by another and another and another as Christmas comes nearer, that hopeful pool of light grows brighter and brighter. Here is the Church's 'New Year's Day', the beginning of a new liturgical year and the welcome chance to start again. The scriptures too carry a new and exciting message, urging us to 'stay awake'; to 'listen' and 'hear'; to 'prepare a way for the Lord'; to 'exult' and 'rejoice', and so to be truly ready to celebrate the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, at Christmas.



A New View of Christmas, by Pam Lewis

Before I became a Christian, Christmas for me was basically about 'what you get'. I never went to church or recognised God in any part of our celebrations. It was simply seen as a holiday; time with family; time to share meals; catch up on the past year.

I became a Christian at 16 years old and everything changed. I will always remember the thrill of that first Christmas. We sang familiar carols and for the first time I saw the words and understood what they meant! Phrases such as 'born to give them second birth' in Hark the Herald Angels Sing or 'What can I give him poor as I am ...give my heart' in the carol In The Bleak Midwinter. I went to my first midnight Mass and was amazed by the beauty of the service and

the wonder of the first Communion of Christmas. I was overwhelmed by the generosity of God in giving Jesus. As I left the church that night, snow had fallen and I was filled with wonder at the beauty of the world God had given.

Since then Christmas has always been a very special time for me. It was hard when I was living at home, before I got married as my family really didn't (and still don't) understand my faith and I had to do what they said. So midnight was the only time I could go to church over Christmas.

After I got married I could do what I wanted and I worked hard to develop our own family traditions for my children, making sure that Jesus was the focus of it all. We still enjoy the fun of presents and Santa and food and everything but it's not about 'what you get' but about knowing what we already have - the greatest gift of all in Jesus.

Faith at Christmas, by Ria Martin

For me, Christmas is not just a time to get lots of hopefully great presents, but also a time for family and a celebration of Jesus' birth. Christmas is always a busy time of year and luckily, I am so involved in my church that I am always able to go to mass over this time. But it is not just at church that I can celebrate this amazing holiday.

My family tradition of setting up the figures in the crib whilst singing carols is always a highlight of the preparation for the season, and we usually send out religious Christmas cards in order to subtly remind people what they should really be celebrating! I really enjoy Christmas Eve, attending and playing at the Children's mass at 6pm, then eagerly waiting to attend midnight mass and sing during the carols beforehand.

I feel many people can miss out on the excitement of Christmas when they celebrate it without real meaning, which makes my faith so important to me at this time. I feel it's a great opportunity to share my belief with those around me and it really makes this season extra special. Things always seem better when there's a meaning behind them, and what better reason for a celebration than the birth of Jesus Christ?!