

## First Sunday of Advent

Dear Parishioners,

A survey, made a decade or so now, revealed that the average person in the Western world spends a whole seven years of his/her life waiting. With strikes on the railways, with extreme weather conditions in both summer and winter, with congestion on the roads (a particular problem at rush hour in Reading/Caversham), with increased security measures at airports and the failure of 25% of those with hospital appointments to turn up, in an average week we can find ourselves waiting on windy station platforms, at bus stops, behind the wheel of our car, in airport transit lounges or in the ante-room at the Eye Clinic in the Royal Berks, for what seem like interminable periods.

In the old days people lit up a cigarette, went through the racing form in the free newspaper, or said a decade or more of the Rosary. Today people stranded at bus stops text, scroll their playlist, or phone a friend who is most likely waiting at another bus stop elsewhere. It is surprising that in an age where we have to wait so much and so frequently that we are so bad at it. Our waiting time becomes wasted time or, at best, a time of pent-up frustration. With so many things available so immediately – thank you Amazon! – we have lost the ability and the patience to wait.

The season of Advent which opens today puts creative, patient waiting at the heart of the Christian experience. During this season we hear the voice of the OT prophets, so eloquent in their articulation of the expectations of the Jewish people that Yahweh's promises to them might be fulfilled, and yet so creative in their suggestions as to how the period which might elapse between promise and fulfilment might be a benefit.

The Jews of old – like their contemporaries, the pagan Greeks and Egyptians – contemplated the stars, the wondrous constellations in the wide open heavens. They sat and watched the sheep graze, the wheat sprout in the fields, the vine become heavy with mature grapes, the fish manoeuvre until eventually finding their way into their nets. In fact, we Christians of today, are urged continually by the Church to be patient, to wait: *expectantes beatam spem et adventum Salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi* – *expecting the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ*. The Virgin Mary waited *expecting the blessed hope throughout* the nine months between the visit of the Angel Gabriel and that mid-winter night in Bethlehem for *the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ*. We will be learning about how Our Lady waited, and the rewards of her patience, in the first session of our parish Advent Course which starts on Monday 3 December at 19.30.

The Jews of OT times, Our Lady and the people of the early Christian communities, such as that of Thessalonica which we hear about this Sunday, teach us a lot about patient, serene and creative waiting. The season of Advent enables and encourages us to sit at their feet and learn to be patient, to wait with serenity, and to focus our gaze on eternal rather than passing things. Park the I-pad, don't reach for the Samsung Galaxy, don't make that unnecessary phone call. Learn to wait today, the blessings of the Lord will come tomorrow.

**Father Patrick**