

## Second Sunday of Advent

Dear Parishioners,

The early Christians made their way across the ancient Roman world travelling on roads that were as straight as the terrain would allow. The Roman armies wanted to get to their destinations as quickly as possible and so their engineers constructed a network of roads the straightness of which amaze archaeologists to this day. The great roads out of Rome itself, the Via Appia to the south east, the Via Flaminia to the north, as well as roads in various parts of the far flung empire such as Britain, with Watling Street and others, were all amazingly straight. The words of the prophet Isaiah about how valley floors will be filled in and mountains and hills made low to provide for the coming of our God would have made sense to all those Jews, Greeks and early Christians, to say nothing of the citizens of the Empire themselves, who used the road network the Romans had elaborated over the centuries.

I had reason to think of the different quality of local roads the other day when I had to drive to Bicester. From here to Watlington and the M 40 the road is very narrow, there are lots of bends, side roads jut out when you least expect them, and there are one or two steep inclines which make a gear shift necessary and where the view is obscured by trees and foliage. And few drivers observe the regular reminders that there is a thirty mile an hour speed limit. The M40 is wide and straight, and the view of traffic in both directions is clear. But there is a lot of traffic and the congestion too brings danger and frustration. All these images of roads and highways from Antiquity and from contemporary Europe come to mind as we reflect on what the Advent season asks of us and what God promises to us. Those of us who search for God and go out to meet him find the spiritual odyssey of life similar to the road between Caversham and Watlington: narrow, lots of twists and turns, obstacles, cross-roads and roundabouts to be negotiated against headwinds and on-coming traffic. But, judging by what Isaiah promised and what the Romans had the good sense to do in their logistical planning for the Empire, God comes to meet us on a road that is straight and smooth.

Maybe the clue lies in attitude: we twist and turn, we slip and slide, we turn corners, deviate onto side roads, descend into valleys and climb hills so as to avoid reaching our destination. We make the road circuitous for ourselves. God wants to get to us directly, no mountain nor valley will impede his progress. Advent affords us the opportunity to look out for him, to knock corners off ourselves through reflection and a repentant re-assessment of our lives, and a resolve to focus on taking the high road to God rather than the low road onto which the world, with all its distractions in a state of hyper activity at this time of year, would wish to lure us on to. John the Baptist warned that the Lord was on his way, and we hear his clarion call this weekend. We might reflect on the roads we have taken thus far in life and see whether, with God coming on the straightest of thoroughfares, we might take the straight road too.

**Father Patrick**