

HE COMES! HE COMES! (HOUSEGROUP NOTES)

Jesus entered the world in the past; he enters our hearts in the present; and he will enter the world again in the future.

The New Testament depicts the Second Coming as the time when the truths of the gospel will be finally and fully vindicated, when God's justice will visibly take effect, and when a new era will commence in which God's glory is apparent to all.

Your housegroup may wish to discuss their views on the Second Coming as a prophesied event and whether those views shape their faith in any way.

The sermon on Sunday centred on how the promise of a Second Coming is accompanied by warnings that Christians should always seek to 'be prepared' for it. The way of achieving that state of preparation is to invite Christ as the light of the world into our hearts and, of course, celebrating Advent is designed to help us do that. The lighting of each of the four red Advent candles on each of the four Sundays preceding Christmas is meant to help focus our minds each week on an essential truth. Together these truths help us truly prepare ourselves to receive Christ into our hearts as we light the fifth and final white candle on Christmas Day.

It's easy for us to let the other things we have to do - especially in the run-up to Christmas - stop us giving proper reflection each week to these truths - and so we arrive at Christmas in a religious sense 'unprepared':

God forgive us for our Christmas;
Help us, Lord, to blush for shame:
Frantic marathons of spending
Practised in the Saviour's name.

Food for those who live in plenty,
Gifts for those who have no need,
Christ, who came to feed the hungry,
Save us from our Christian greed.

I suggest therefore that **the group might like to spend time thinking about the Advent candles and how they can help us to prepare our hearts to celebrate Christmas properly.**

In this context:

1. **The first candle is lit to remind us that believers should always live in HOPE.** For centuries the elders of Israel had urged the people to live in the hope that God would send a Saviour. That hope was realised in the first coming of Christ. For centuries the Church has been urging people to live in the hope of a Second Coming, which, like the first, will happen at a time of God's choosing. One of the worst things that can happen to a person is to despair and lose hope. Hope gives us the strength to cope with difficult situations. Hope also gives us a reason for doing things - that's why Martin Luther once wrote that 'everything that is done in the world is done by hope'. **So what hopes do you have - and how do those hopes impinge on what you do?**

2. **The second candle is lit to remind us that we must TRUST God because he fulfils all that he promises.** The Christmas stories tell how the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus - his birth in Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt to avoid the slaughter of the innocents, his childhood

in Nazareth, etc. When the aged Simeon saw the Christ child, he said: 'Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. With my own eyes I have seen your salvation'. The disciples, living alongside the adult Jesus, said they knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah : 'We know because we have heard with our own ears, we have seen with our own eyes, and touched with our own hands'. The famous preacher Peter Marshall once wrote: 'I know that the promises of God are true, for they have been fulfilled in my own life, time and time again. Jesus still teaches and guides and protects and heals and comforts and still wins our complete trust and our love. These things I know'. **So what are the things that God has done in our lives that help us to feel we can trust in God?**

3. The third Advent candle is lit to remind us of John the Baptist and his message of REPENTANCE. He asked people to prepare for the coming of Christ by recognising their faults and failings and seeking God's forgiveness. Only then would they be cleansed from their sins. This cleansing was, of course, symbolised through baptism. Repentance is such an important part of preparing ourselves to invite Christ into our hearts that Mark began his gospel with the story of John rather than providing his readers with Christmas stories. **So in what ways this Christmas are we seeking to recognise our failings and repenting? And seeking God's forgiveness?**

4. The fourth Advent candle is lit to remind us of Mary, whose OBEDIENCE was unquestioning. But it is worth remembering that in the Christmas stories it is not only Mary who acts in the way God wants: Joseph marries the pregnant Mary 'as the angel of the Lord had told him to do'; the shepherds 'hurry off' to visit Jesus in response to the angels' message; and the wise men risk the wrath of King Herod rather than tell him the whereabouts of the child because 'God warned them in a dream'. Christ, of course told his followers to obey above all else two commands: to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength; and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves and as Christ has loved us. **So in what ways are we seeking to be obedient in the way we worship and the way we serve?**

5. The fifth and white candle on Christmas Day. Here is what an American called Og Mandino wrote about celebrating Christmas Day:

I will greet this day with love in my heart. And how will I do this? Henceforth will I look on all things with love and I will be born again. I will love the sun for it warms my bones; yet I will love the rain for it cleanses my spirit. I will love the light for it shows me the way; yet I will love the darkness for it shows me the stars. I will welcome happiness for it enlarges my heart; yet I will endure sadness for it opens my soul. I will acknowledge rewards for they are my due; yet I will welcome obstacles for they are my challenge.

Share the ways in which you will try to ensure that Christ does not get forgotten amid all the celebrations on Christmas Day.

G.M. Best Dec 2018