



Anglican Catholic Church



## Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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*My dear friends and colleagues,*

Have you had a hard year? Maybe you've lost a loved one, experienced the end of a relationship, or have been overwhelmed by disappointments, suffering, or poor health. Perhaps the last thing you want to do is celebrate the holidays as depression creeps in. And no amount of Christmas goodies or shopping can fill the void left by another person. Of course it's all right to cry, to mourn and be sad. But remember God is here with us. He loves us deeply. As Psalm 147:3 proclaims, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Sometimes, though, it doesn't feel that way. It can be hard to see what God is doing in the midst of trouble. We may feel forgotten or unloved. Our view of God may become distorted by our circumstances. But God knows our hearts and has a much bigger plan for us.



When Mary, the mother of Jesus, became pregnant, she probably felt very alone. Few believed that the virgin had become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and not by a man. The situation appeared scandalous, and gossip probably occupied the neighbourhood. Yet, God was with her – even when she had to travel a long way at the end of her pregnancy and give birth to her firstborn far from home. There was no room for her at the inn, so she was in a dark stable while giving birth to "the Light that lightens every man that cometh into the world". Even in one of life's most troublesome and darkest times, she found the greatest joy and hope of her life.

God has extraordinary love for each of us and doesn't want us to live in despair or hopelessness. He wants us to find joy in Him and share that joy with others. Despite how we might feel during the so-called festive season, we are never alone. In fact, Jesus Christ came down from heaven *to be with each one of us*. That is the true meaning of Christmas – love so great that it knows no bounds or distance. The distance of separation we may feel from Him or others at this time of year is nothing compared to the distance that God has already gone for us. Nevertheless, He cares for our hurting hearts this season and sees us as His beloved children.

We must try to let that relationship with the One who made us satisfy the empty void in our souls. Instead of focusing on the absence of someone or something else, we must try to let the presence of God be enough. I do know that is far easier said than done. We don't have to listen to Christmas music or put up baubles to celebrate the feast; we simply have to know the love of a Saviour who desires to be with each of us through every moment of every season of life.

Wishing you a Blessed Christmas and New Year

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# Symbols of the Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath originated a few hundred years ago among the Lutherans of eastern Germany. The wreath itself is round – a circle. This reminds us of the crowns worn by kings and also of the coming crown of thorns. It points out to us that Jesus Christ is our true King and that He is victorious over those things which would hurt us – evil, sin, and death.

The wreath, being circular, is a symbol of the eternity of God, who, like a circle, has neither beginning nor end. The candles placed on the wreath remind us that in Jesus' birth at Bethlehem, He who was eternal, the Son of God, entered into our world of time and change. (Theologians call this the “intersection of time and eternity”. How amazing that such a profound idea can be made visible by a few branches and candles!)



## Candles

Set on the branches of the wreath are four candles: often three purple and one pink, and in the centre of the wreath waits a white candle. As a whole, these candles represent the coming of the light of Christ into the world. There are a number of variations on the symbolism of each candle. Here is one version.

On the first Sunday of Advent, the first candle is lit. This candle is sometimes called the *Prophecy* candle in remembrance of the prophets, primarily Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ. This candle represents hope or expectation in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

On the second Sunday of Advent, the second candle is lit. This candle is considered to represent love. Some traditions call this the *Bethlehem* candle, symbolizing Christ's manger.

On the third Sunday of Advent the pink, or rose-coloured candle is lit, in the purple/pink sequence. This pink candle is often called the *Shepherds'* candle, sometimes *Our Lady's* candle, and represents joy (the name of this Sunday is “Gaudete” Sunday, the Latin word in the Introit for “Rejoice”). The vestments on this Sunday may also be a rose-pink colour.

The fourth and last candle, often known as the *Angels'* candle, represents peace and is lit on the fourth Sunday of Advent.

On Christmas Eve, the white centre candle is lit. This candle is called the *Christ* candle and represents the light of Christ that has come into the world. The colour of white represents purity. Christ is the sinless, spotless, pure Saviour. Also, those who receive Christ as Saviour are washed of their sins and made whiter than snow.



Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.

(C. S. Lewis)

*(As a small self-indulgence I will often use as a “desk picture” some Isle of Sheppey scenes viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes of it!)*