

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday 30 November, 2025 – First Sunday in Advent
A Light Has Dawned
Readings – Isaiah 9:1-7; Matthew 4:12-17

Today is the first Sunday in Advent, the beginning of a New Year in the Church calendar. The Christian year ends with the Feast of Christ the King and we celebrated last Sunday that the King of kings and the Lord of lords shall reign for ever and ever.

Advent is centred around four themes - “hope”, “peace”, “joy”, and “love,” symbolized by four candles in a wreath, three purple, and one pink. The large white candle in the middle is the Christ candle which is lit on Christmas Eve. Today’s theme is that of Christian hope.

Both readings today spoke of the “Land of Zebulum and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.” This is the land of the shadow of death that the prophet Isaiah described but we too know this land, it is the reality of our life and we walk through its valleys – the shadow of bad news, of terrible diagnosis, of financial crises, of gloom and anxiety over our world, the fear of war and destruction that hangs over our future, the inner darkness of regret and so on ...

Into this landscape the gospel of Matthew makes a breath-taking announcement. Matthew says that Jesus began his public ministry in the territories of Zebulum and Naphtali – regions historically steeped in darkness, conquered and led into exile by the Assyrians, they knew the shadow of death intimately. It is here on this spiritually stained and forgotten ground that Matthew declares quoting Isaiah: “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.” (Isaiah 9:2 & Matthew 4:16)

This is the foundation of our Advent hope. The light of Christ does not shine in the pristine halls of power or the sunny courtyards of the self-righteous. It dawns in the places of deepest need. It pierces the gloom of our own individual and collective Zebulum and Naphtali – the scarred, the broken and the forgotten places of our hearts and lives.

A young boy, ashamed of his paper covered in blotches and scribbles, reluctantly brought it to his teacher expecting a scolding and punishment for the mess he had made.

But when the teacher looked at him, his eyes held only love. He didn’t see failure; he saw the child’s effort. Gently, the teacher took the soiled paper and set it aside.

He smiled, handed the boy a crisp, clean sheet of paper and said, “Do not be afraid of the mess. They are part of your learning process. Here is a new fresh start. Try again.”

The boy’s shame vanished, replaced by grace and the courage to begin anew. He wasn’t in trouble. He was loved. He was given a second chance not because he deserved it, but because the teacher was gracious.

This dawning light in the person of Jesus does two profound things. First, this light reveals the truth in love. Light shows things as they really are. The light of Jesus reveals our sins, our brokenness, the blots and scribbles on the pages of our lives.

But it is not that of a harsh, interrogator or that of condemnation. It is a warm, revealing light offering us a new beginning. It is the light of the teacher who looks at our soiled paper and sees not failure to punish, but a child to love. Jesus sees our effort, our struggle, our weakness. In his light, we can be honest about our darkness because we know we are seen by the eyes of grace.

Second, this light speaks of hope. Matthew immediately follows this proclamation with the first public words of Jesus: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Repent simply means turn around. If a light dawns around you, you turn your back on the lingering shadows and you face the source of light. You turn from the darkness of self-reliance, fear and sin toward the new reality that has broken in – the kingdom of heaven in the person of Jesus.

Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States used a powerful image in his sermon at the wedding of Prince Harry and Megan Markle. He threw out a challenge to:

“imagine a world where love is the way;
imagine families where love is the way;
imagine nations where love is the way;
imagine commerce where love is the way;
imagine international relations where love is the way ...”

It sounds very much like the kingdom of heaven.

This Advent, as we wait, let us remember that we are not merely waiting for a light. We are also celebrating the light that has already dawned in the person of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we turn from the shadow of anxiety and face the ‘Light of the World’ who holds our future.

We turn from the gloom of regret and face the One who offers a clean sheet, a fresh start.

We turn from the darkness of despair and face the Dawn – who is making all things new.

He has promised us that the night will not last and the shadow will not prevail. For the people living in darkness have seen a great light.

On you and me, on this world of darkness and shadow of death, a light has dawned. His name is Jesus. Amen.

Dolapo Ogunbawo