

Tanjong Series 8:

ADVENT: THE TRUE BEGINNING OF THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

Many people naturally assume that the new year begins on January 1st—and for the civil calendar (Gregorian Calendar) it does. However, within the life of the Church, particularly in the Anglican tradition, the Christian year begins much earlier and with far deeper meaning. The Church's new year starts on the **First Sunday of Advent**.

This is not merely a symbolic gesture; it is a profound theological statement about how believers understand time. The Christian year does not begin with noise, resolutions, or celebration. It begins quietly—with longing, waiting, and hoping in the coming of the Messiah— Jesus our Emmanuel

While the world ends its year in a frenzy of activity, the Church begins hers with a single candle and the ancient cry: **“Come, Lord Jesus.”**

Why Advent Begins the Christian Year

The liturgical year tells the story of Jesus Christ. Advent begins that story because it draws us to the beginning of our salvation—not only the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, but also His promised coming again in glory.

Advent holds together two great movements of Christian faith:

1. **The First Coming** – Christ in the manger, God with us.
2. **The Second Coming** – Christ returning as Judge and King.

The Church year begins with expectation because the believer's life begins with **God's promise**, not human effort. Advent places before us the truth that our hope is not in our own strength but in the One who comes to save. For this reason, the Christian calendar opens with watchfulness, repentance, readiness, and hope.

Biblical Foundations of Advent

The Scripture readings appointed for Advent (according to the lectionary) draw from prophetic imagery and apocalyptic expectation. They prepare believers to understand God's promises across history:

- **Isaiah 2, 7, 9, 11** – The great prophecies of the coming Messiah
- **Romans 13:11–14** – “Wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer now”
- **Matthew 24–25** – Christ's teaching on watchfulness
- **Luke 1** – The Annunciation and the role of John the Baptist
- **John 1** – The Light coming into the world

Through these passages, the Church is reminded that:

- Time is moving toward Christ.
- God's promises stretch across generations.
- The world is waiting for redemption.
- Believers are called to prepare their hearts.

Historical Development of Advent

Advent has deep and ancient roots within the early Church.

- **4th–5th centuries** – Early forms of Advent appear in Gaul and Spain as seasons of preparation.
- **6th century** – Rome develops Advent more formally.
- **Medieval period** – Advent becomes universally recognised in Western Christianity.
- **Reformation onward** – Anglicanism retains Advent because of its rich biblical and theological foundations.

In early English tradition, preserved in the **Book of Common Prayer**, Advent emphasises the “Four Last Things”: **Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell**. This focus reminds believers that Advent is not a sentimental pre-Christmas festival but a season of profound spiritual preparation.

Spiritual Significance for Believers Today

The Christian year ends with the feast of **Christ the King** and begins with Advent, giving the Church a rhythm that shapes our spiritual life.

1. **We begin with longing.**
The spiritual journey starts with a desire for God, not self-confidence.
2. **We begin with preparation.**
Advent invites us to make space for Christ—spiritually, morally, and relationally.
3. **We begin with repentance.**
The traditional Collect for Advent 1 asks for grace to “cast away the works of darkness.”
4. **We begin with waiting.**
Not passive waiting, but active, prayerful readiness.
5. **We begin with hope.**
Even amid the world's darkness, Advent proclaims that the Light is coming.

Advent teaches believers to begin the year not in the noise of culture but in the promises of God.

Theology in Advent

Christian tradition understands Christ's coming in **three profound ways**:

1. **Christ Coming in History**
The Incarnation—God made flesh for our salvation.
2. **Christ Coming in Mystery**
His presence among us through Scripture, Sacrament, and the life of the Church.
3. **Christ Coming in Majesty**
His return as Judge and King at the end of time.

This threefold understanding appears throughout classic Anglican homilies, collects, and lectionary readings.

Conclusion

For Christians, Advent is far more than an optional pre-Christmas observance. It is the true beginning of the Christian year and a season that shapes how we live, wait, and hope. Advent invites us to:

- Start the year with **Christ at the centre**.
- Listen for His coming.
- Hope in His promise to make all things new.

As the world rushes ahead, Advent invites believers to pause and reflect. As culture emphasises noise and consumption, Advent calls us back to prayer and preparation. While society looks to January 1st, the Church looks to the horizon and whispers:

“Come, Lord Jesus.”

And perhaps also prays:

“Begin a new beginning in me, O God, as Your light shines.”

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