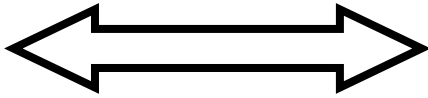


## Forwards and backwards

Advent is one of those times of year in the Christian calendar when we try and look in two directions at once.

- We **look forward** to celebrating the birth of God's Saviour for humankind, once again, ...
- as we **look back** to the birth of Jesus, 2,000 years ago.
- But we also **look forward** to his return as king at the end of this present age.



This year, we are beginning our Christmas celebrations earlier than in previous years, with a special **Advent All-Age Service** on **Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December, from 11.00am – 12 noon.**

The season of advent is an opportunity to compare and contrast Christ's first appearance on earth with his return at the end of this present age.

### ➤ **Humble/majestic**

The first appearance of God's Son on earth was extraordinarily low key for one so great. He appeared as a baby in great humility, being laid to rest in an animal's feeding trough, because there was no room for him in the normal living quarters set aside for human beings.

But how different his comeback will be!

- The Bible tells us that *the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels* [2 Thessalonians 1.7].
- *At that time, people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory*, Jesus himself tells us in Mark 13.26.
- *The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God*, Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4.16.
- He will *be marvelled at among all those who have believed*, Paul tells us [2 Thessalonians 1.10].

Our Lord's comeback will be awesome. It will completely take our breath away. It will be overwhelming in its majesty.

### ➤ **Obscure/Global**

At the first Christmas, God's Son was hidden away in obscurity. He was born in the small town of Bethlehem, not in the capital city, Jerusalem, as many might have expected; and his arrival was witnessed by only a handful of people.

How different it will be for Jesus on his comeback! His

impact will be instantaneously global, every media mogul's dream!

- *For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man*, Jesus tells us in Matthew 24.27,30. *All the nations of the earth ... will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.*
- *Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him*, John tells us in the last book of the Bible (Revelation 1.7).

### ➤ **Expected/sudden**

The timing of Christ's first appearance on earth was fairly predictable for those in the know. Mary and Joseph were given nine months notice of the great event! They may even have pencilled a date in their diaries for it!

But how different the timing of the comeback will be!

- *"No one knows about that day or hour*, Jesus tells us in Mark 13.32-37 - *not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. So, be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.*
- Jesus will come back when many people are least expecting him he tell us in Matthew 24.37-44. *As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

### ➤ **Suffering/gathering**

Perhaps the greatest contrast between Christ's first appearance on earth and his return at the end of this present age has to do with their purposes.

- As far as the past is concerned, Hebrews 9.26,28 tells us *Jesus appeared once for all time to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ... Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.* Jesus came to suffer for our sins.
- But as far as the future is concerned, the writer goes on to tell us that *Jesus will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him* [Hebrews 9.28].
- *He will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens*, Mark 13.27 tells us. Jesus will come again to gather his people to himself forever!

## Celebrating Christmas with us

Here are some of the other Christmas and New Year

special events lined up for the coming weeks.

- **10.30am Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> December: *Christmas Drop-in*** – see Elaine Willmore for further details.
- **7.00-9.00pm Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> December: *Mezzanine Christmas Special***. See Gareth or Mandy Williams for further details.
- **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> December: *Carol singing in Gateshead town Centre*** (provisional). See Ray or Val Hill for further details.
- **7.00pm Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> December – *Carol singing at the Lyndholme Care Home***, Low Fell. See Paul Harris for further details.
- **7.30pm Friday 21<sup>st</sup> December – *carols, coffee and mince pies at the Hunts***. Ask David or Elma Hunt for further details.
- **Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> December: *11.00am All-Age Christmas Service*, and *6.30pm Christmas Carol Service***. A few more singers would be helpful for the group that Ray Hill and Gareth Williams are putting together for the Carol Service. Let them know if you are available.
- **11.00am – 12 noon, Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> December, *Christmas Day All-age Service***.
- **Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> December: *no midweek meeting***.
- **11.00am Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> December**. Morning service with guest speaker, Rev David Neil, from Houghton-le-Spring. There will be *no evening service this Sunday*.
- **Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2008: *no midweek meeting***
- **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2008. *Verses-of-the-Year Sunday*** – services 11.00am and 6.30pm.
- **Monday 7<sup>th</sup> & Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2008. *Christianity Explored*** groups resume.

## News from our Members' Meeting

Here is a quick update on some of the decisions taken and items discussed at our recent Half-Yearly Church Members' Meeting.

### • Election of Deacons

We are delighted to be able to report an additional member for our church leadership team, Ray Hill. Ray, a former Primary School Head Teacher, will bring a wealth of experience to his new role in the church. We are also delighted that Paul Harris has been re-elected as a deacon to serve for a further six years.

### • Budget for 2008 and estimate for 2009.

Projections for the current financial year indicate that we expect our General Fund income to exceed its expenditure by just under £3,000 (excluding £10,000 transferred from our General Fund to our Building Refurbishment Fund). Our budget anticipated we would breakeven this year, so we praise God for the anticipated surplus. Our weekly offering this year has been running at £467 against a budget figure of £420. We give God all the glory for moving his people's hearts to give so generously.

2008 will be a very significant year for us financially. This time last year we decided to apply for a 'nil' Home

Mission grant for 2008, i.e. to become self-supporting. This will be a great challenge for us as a fellowship but, with the Lord's help, I believe we can rise to it.

We have set **a target of £490 for our weekly offering for 2008**, a 5% increase on our anticipated figure for 2007. Our Thank Offering target has been revised to £4,000. Assuming no outside donations, we anticipate a deficit of just over £3,000 on our General Fund, to be met from reserves or covered through increased giving. No provision has been made for any transfers to our Building Refurbishment Fund.

### • Building Refurbishment Work.

We are pleased to be able to report that recent roof work now completed cost considerably less than we were anticipating. Our 'worst case' estimate was just under £6,000 but the actual cost was only £2,730.70, of which £406.70 is recoverable VAT, giving a final bill of £2,324.00.

Following payment for this roof work, we currently have £16,580 in hand in our Building Refurbishment Fund, plus £4,000 due in VAT refunds and £2,500 pledged in grants but not yet received – giving a grand total of £23,000.

We are actively seeking further grants to renew the heating system for our church halls and ancillary rooms, provide additional ladies toilets, and carry out much-needed refurbishment to our halls and ancillary rooms. The total cost has been estimated at £118,000! Please pray that the church leadership will be granted wisdom as we seek to discern the best way forward.

### • American Youth Interims

We had hoped to have personnel in place by the beginning of next month, but this looks increasingly unlikely, due in part to a shortage of suitable candidates. We have been looking for males rather than females to reflect the current gender balance of our youth clubs.

However, in view of the fact that we anticipate a General Fund deficit of £3,000 for 2008, excluding the cost of the interims, we feel it would be unwise to rush into any appointments without additional funding being in place. The estimated current cost for two interims for a year is £6,000. Despite applying to over 40 organisations for grant money, none has been forthcoming so far. Please continue to make this a matter of prayer so that we discern the right way forward.

Let me take this opportunity of wishing all our readers, scattered around the world, a very happy Christmas and a new year full of the Lord's blessings for you.

*David Hunt*