

Morning Assembly_ Advent – Hope

7th December, 2015

With Victoria Harbour lit up by the glittering Christmas lights in buildings along the harbour, with all the big Christmas sales in department stores and Christmas decorations in shopping centres, hotels and theme parks, it is hard not to feel that Christmas is here already though it is still two weeks away. Christmas is indeed a wonderful time. It is a time for family reunion, a time of festivity with good food, parties and presents. Everyone is busy decking the Christmas tree at home with beautiful lights and ornaments, decorating their home with Christmas wreaths, stockings and figurines, ordering food for the long awaited Christmas parties, going on a shopping spree to buy presents for the loved ones or booking tours for their much needed Christmas break. Everyone is waiting eagerly with much anticipation because Santa Claus is coming to town.

The church is equally busy preparing but not because Santa Claus is coming. The church celebrates Christmas rather differently though with the same kind of anticipation and eagerness. The Christmas season in fact begins four weeks before the Christmas day. We call this period “Advent” which means “to come”. It reminds us of the coming of baby Jesus into the world to live among us and die for us two thousand years ago. It also reminds us of the coming of Jesus into our hearts to live within us now. Finally, it reminds us of the second coming of Christ in the future as the King and the Judge. In short, Advent is about the past, the present and the future.

During Advent, the colour that you will see on the priest’s vestments is violet which is the colour of royalty. During the weeks leading up to Christmas, the Advent candles are lit. One candle is lit on the first Sunday, two on the second Sunday and so on. The last candle in the middle is usually lit on Christmas Day and it represents Jesus, the light of the world. This is somewhat like a Christmas countdown and here at St. Paul’s College, we will light the candles in the school assembly one by one next week until our Carol Service.

The Nativity scene or the manger scene which shows the birth of Jesus is also displayed during Advent in churches. It often consists of the figures of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and a variety of animals such as a donkey and sheep. Sometimes, it is also adorned with the star of Bethlehem, an angel and the Magi (the three wise men coming from the East to pay their respect to baby Jesus). If there is a crib or a manger in the display, people often wait until Christmas Day before they place baby Jesus in the crib. Likewise, our Visual Arts Department has helped us set up the Nativity scene here in the school hall.

During the weeks leading up to Christmas many churches will host a carol service. These services are made up of songs and Bible readings that together tell the Christmas story beginning with the Old Testament prophecies. That is why we also hold our carol service every year before we break up for the Christmas holiday. The St. Paul's College Alumni Choir is also organising a Christmas carol service at St. Paul's Church this Saturday on 19th December at 6:30 p.m. for everyone in the St. Paul's College family including students, parents, alumni and teachers.

Advent is about waiting, waiting with anticipation for the coming of Jesus. Advent is also about hope, the fulfillment of hope. The people of Israel had been waiting centuries for the promised Messiah to come and deliver them from bondage and slavery. The coming of the Saviour was foreshadowed by the arrival of Moses and the deliverance from the tyranny of the Egyptian Pharaoh. The birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of that ancient longing for a Messiah. The Messiah has come - not in the form of a triumphant king but that of a servant king. The Saviour has come - not just for the people of Israel but for all the people of the whole world. And the deliverance has come - not from foreign domination but from the bondage of sin.

How relevant is this message of hope to us? In our world of comfort and plenty, we may have easily forgotten how precious a ray of hope is for people who are in despair, who are in desperation, who are down in the dumps. Christmas may be a very happy season for many but for those who are struggling with all sorts of adversity in life, it may be unbearably hard. Yet the message of Advent is one of hope. It is an assurance that light will triumph over darkness, that justice will eventually prevail over evil. It is an assurance

that God lives among us, for it is written in Isaiah 7:14, this child would be given the name Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”

Advent, a word that means, “the coming,” is about the coming of hope into an anxious world. So go into Advent with hope in your heart, and let us find ways to share that hope with those around us.

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