

## The Weekly Letter

Dear Friends,

Ruth has asked me to circulate a version of my recent *Church Times* article as part of this Advent Sunday mailing. It comes with my own very best wishes for the season, and the special challenge and opportunity it presents us with this year to keep Advent more clearly than we sometimes do.

With all best wishes,

+ David Thomson

### Save Christmas: Keep Advent!

The Jeremiahs have it... The COVID statistics make it clear that things are getting worse before they get better, and the public mood is slowly trying to come to terms with that, as we struggle to agree what measures to take..

We were desperate that it should not be so. Desperate to get back to life as we liked it. Just life, not this dark pall of deathliness and depression. And desperate too to save Christmas.

But Christmas is about God saving us, not us saving it. That is about real light shining perilously in real darkness, not fairy lights on a tree. Even if warm hearths and family togetherness are what we long for, they are powerful because they speak not just of a kiss under the mistletoe or a blow-out meal but of a deeper sense that winter will not have things all its own way, of unconquerable light. We've been celebrating it since Stonehenge, and we want and need to celebrate it now.

But just saying 'boo' to the darkness, or indeed the virus, and getting on with the party is going to end in tears. Let me put it starkly. It's three weeks before Christmas. Blow it, you say, we're going to have a party. It's two weeks before Christmas and, blow it you say, let's go shopping, but some of your friends cry off because they're feeling a bit poorly. It's one week before Christmas and you're feeling a bit poorly yourself; your best mate has just gone into hospital. It's Christmas, and ... well, the shine has well and truly gone off the gingerbread and no-one is feeling much like celebrating any more.

So? What can we do? Is there anything we can do? Let's go back to the deeper traditions of Advent and Christmas. From ancient times Christians kept fasts before they dived into their feasts. They didn't take the waiting out of wanting: they knew that a bit of waiting, a bit of preparing, a bit of pondering, would make the feast all the more fun.

Cue Advent: not just the Advent of a boozy miniature a day in December, but the Advent that starts 4 Sundays before Christmas and takes us slowly and carefully through the Bible's story of how we got into this pickle we call life, and how God's plan to join us in it and raise us from it came to pass. It's all those readings you've heard at a traditional Carol Service, but old school, taken slowly, savoured for all they're worth. Then at Christmas the Great Twelve Days of Feasting can begin.

The four candles of the Advent wreath can be our theme. They are often understood to represent Hope, Peace, Faith and Love. Let's light them this year not just in church but in our homes and even in our windows to speak of hope, of justice and peace, of faith, of love.

So, this year, how about Saving Christmas by Keeping Advent? Look for safe ways to buy the presents and order the food. Give some time to writing some personal cards or messages. Then dust down your Bible and look up the stories for yourself. Light a candle for each Sunday. And enjoy the peace. Peace now, as you give Christmas the best chance it can have of going off well; and the promise of a peace that passes our understanding that can surround us come what may.

*David Thomson*