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| **Advent Sunday**  **Wake up!** | | |
|  | Father of all, give us ears to hear you, minds to meet you, and hearts to respond to your living presence.   AMEN    **Wake up!!**  Maybe I should be saying this at the end of the sermon, but I wanted to start with it too today.    Did you notice that both our Bible readings this morning contained the recommendation to "Wake up"? Now is the time to be awake, to stay awake.  This is not just referring to those of us who were at the YCs panto last night, or indeed at any other festive, joyous or liquid celebration last night, and who may be feeling a bit tired this morning.    **It's** about advent, and that is what I'd like to talk about this morning.    For today is, of course, the first Sunday of Advent, a special season in the church's year.  The word comes from the Latin "veni" to come, and the French venir - ad veni is to come towards.    So traditionally this is the time when we are looking eagerly to celebrate Jesus's coming to us, born as a baby on Christmas Day.  It's a time of excitement and anticipation; I always enjoy getting out the Christmas decorations each year, remembering where they came from and remembering past Christmases, and hoping for a wonderful Christmas this year.  And for children it's an especially exciting time, with secrets, presents being hidden, all building up to the big day.  The waiting and the build-up is definitely part of Christmas.    In memory of that **first** time that Jesus came to us, as a baby, we give each other gifts, echoing the gifts of the Wise Men and also God's gift to us of His own son.    So what does all this have to do with waking up and staying awake?  Surely with so much to do, and for our excited children, staying awake is not a problem...  I think this state of wakefulness, alertness is much more to do with Jesus' second coming.  Advent, I discover, is the season when we think about both the First and the Second Coming - the first coming is the nativity story, and that is very prominent in our church activities over this period, with the nativity play, the crib service, the presents.    But the **Second** Coming, when Jesus will come in glory to judge the world, is a different matter.  It will be too late then for us to explain that we were always meaning to go to church, to get round to helping our neighbours, to find time to pray, to remember to include Jesus in our daily lives, but were too busy to get round to all this stuff.. will we be ashamed to look our Lord in the face, the Lord who was willing to die for us, so that we could be reconciled to God?    So now, right now, Advent, is the time when we are invited to wake up, get a grip, re-order our priorities, and prepare ourselves to meet our Lord.  In the early days after Jesus' death and resurrection, the apostles were convinced that the Second Coming was just around the corner.  "Repent and be saved!" was their cry, and there was urgency about it too.  The early church did not see the need to establish many complicated rules for this new Christian religion, because they didn't think they were going to be around for very long.  Now, nearly two thousand years later, we've got a bit more casual about expecting the Second Coming.  To be honest, we're not expecting it in our lifetime - apart from the sandwich board men proclaiming "The End is Nigh"- which is why is it's so good, even once a year, to be jolted into thinking about it and doing something about it.    Matthew 24:42  Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming ... v.44  Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.    Romans 13:11  You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep..the night is far gone, the day is near .. let us live honourably as in the day, not in debauchery, quarrelling, jealousy    So Advent is a time of penance, of self-examination.  And just as Easter and Christmas are the key points of the Christian year, so we need Lent and Advent to prepare ourselves for them, to clear out rubbish, put things right, be ready to meet Him and to celebrate.    And this is the point that I'd like to make today - we have been thinking about Jesus coming to us, in the past (as a baby, to redeem us) and in the future (the Second Coming, to judge us and to reign in glory).  In the light of both these perspectives, the past promises of a Messiah redeemed, the future still to come, we are urged to reflect on the present moment; to reflect on the lives we are living, have we received the peace, the forgiveness, the joy Christ offers, and are we ready to welcome Him if He should return today?  What does God think about our past, our present, and our future?    So this is a time of renewing our faith.  Are we settling for the familiar, believing we know it all?  Is our faith no longer particularly exciting?  Have we accommodated (sold-out) to the way of the world, by habit or by familiarity?    Could the ad-vent, the coming towards, also be us coming towards Christ?  In preparing ourselves to be ready to meet Him, are we not taking tentative steps to accepting Him and His invitation to us, to believe in Him as the Son of God, our Saviour?  That this is something very much of the present, of today?    Like the picture of Mary and Joseph with the young Jesus in a buggy, arriving at the Three Kings' Palace on Christmas Day.  ""last year they came to us, this year we'll go to them..."    So here we have it.  Last Christmas Jesus came to us; isn't it now our turn to come to Him?    WAKE UP!    I wish you a happy and blessed Advent.    AMEN  **Alex Sanders** |  |