

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Herschel Carol Service
5 December 2012

Christmas is coming!

What are you looking forward to?

Perhaps it is the holidays. Are you going somewhere exciting? Or just looking forward to a good rest? (Rest is certainly close to the top of my wish list!)

Perhaps it is time with friends and family. Perhaps you have some special plans of what you want to do.

And what about Christmas itself and presents?

Christmas is coming!

Or perhaps you are looking ahead with some trepidation!

Christmas can be hectic: a busy and stressful time, with shopping and cooking and all the other preparations.

The expectation that we HAVE to have a good time can put us all under a lot of stress, and tensions rise to the surface, and sometimes families find Christmas a hard time.

Christmas is coming!

And what about other changes which are on the horizon?

Perhaps it is just looking ahead to a new year at school. Perhaps there are bigger changes coming in your life – Matric results, and then what?

Or retirement! Mr Probyn – are you looking forward to retirement? We thank you for all you have done at Herschel, for Herschel, and we wish you God's rich blessings!

I'm sure you have plans – but even so, I am sure there is much about retirement that will be completely unexpected.

And the unexpected can make all of us a little nervous.

Christmas is coming!

The Church, as you probably know, calls this time of year, the 4 weeks before Christmas, 'Advent'.

The word 'Advent' means 'coming'.

We look forward to the coming of Jesus.

We look forward in two ways.

First, we look forward to celebrating once again the birth of Jesus Christ, some 2000 years ago.

It is the reminder that God did not create the universe, and human beings within it, and then leave us on our own – so that we had no hope but our own efforts if we made a mess, or needed help, or couldn't cope.

No, God comes to us – God puts on flesh, becomes human, one of us.

He does not come like a tourist on holiday, to look at us and take photos, and then go back to the comfort of his heavenly home!

He experiences life 'from the inside' – all the strains of growing up, adolescence, changing from child to young person to adult; and then all the ups and downs that life brings to all of us: the good times, the bad times; the happy times, the sad times; of hopes fulfilled and of being let down.

And of course, he knows what it is like when friends and family die; to suffer pain; and even to die.

So the baby in the manger became the man on the cross, who was raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven, and sits in glory at the right hand side of God the Father.

He prays for us, 24/7, knowing all our needs. And he promises to return.

That is the second 'coming' of Jesus Christ, to which we look forward in Advent.

We don't know how it will happen, but God promises that there will be a 'grand finale' – the greatest 'grand finale' of all!

It is the promise that all of creation, and everything in it, including all of us who are ready to say Yes to God's offer – we will 'all live happily ever after' in the infinite love and goodness of God.

All the battling of our lives will be over. All the wrongs will be righted. All the tears – says the Bible – will be wiped away.

Pain and evil and suffering and death will be done away with; and God's immeasurable joy will be ours.

Yet, as I said, we don't know how this will be – and we don't know when!

But we are to 'be ready'.

And this challenges us to expect a third 'coming of Jesus'.

It is the coming of Jesus Christ into our lives – not 2000 years ago; not in God's mysterious future – but now, day by day.

At his Ascension, Jesus promised his followers 'I will be with you always, to the end of time.'

And this is what he promises us too – to be alongside us, to help us.

He's not like Santa Claus – we can't just give him lists of what we want!

He's better – he knows exactly what we need most – better than we know ourselves.

And that's the best present of all.

There is a wonderful blessing, that I shall use later, that sums it up.

It speaks of God's gifts of eagerness, to the shepherds; of joy, shared by the angels; of the wisdom and perseverance of the Magi, the kings; and how Mary, and Joseph, in their different ways, were enabled to respond with ready obedience to God's call on their lives.

And above all of these is the gift of peace – that deep inner knowledge, that, no matter how much turmoil there is in our lives, that underneath, God truly is in control, and will see us through, and we will know the joy of his final 'Grand Finale'.

In Advent, we are reminded not just that Christmas is coming, but that Jesus Christ comes, bringing to us, from the bottomless sack of God's love, the most perfect gifts that each of us needs.

The birth of Jesus opened the way for us to receive whatever we most lack, in our deepest selves – whatever we most require to help us become more fully, more fundamentally, more completely, more freely, our truest selves, as God created us to be.

So may you have a blessed Christmas – and may you find that all your deepest wants and needs are met in Jesus Christ, whose coming we celebrate once again.

Amen

[For use either at the end of the sermon, or at the end of the service, if you are asked to do the blessing there.]

‘May the eagerness of the shepherds, the joy of the angels, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph and Mary, and the peace of the Christ-child be yours, this Christmas, and may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you always.’