

Between Two Advents

Introduction

Christmas presents Christians a very interesting tension.

A journey backwards and forwards, via the first Christmas, to the start of everything, and then all the way forward to the end of this world as we know it, and look at Christmas through the lens of God's plan, and the advent of Christ.

The First Advent

Advent is a significant season in the traditional church calendar

Daily 'lectionary' readings from the Bible

The first advent was not the end of the story

Two Advents

Matthew's initial birth account

Matthew 1:18-23

In the Beginning

From the very beginning of the Genesis story, God is looking to be in relationship with His people – the ones He created in His image.

When God's people reject God's plan for them, exile is the result.

The first Christmas, the first advent, sits right in the middle of a story that is crying out for a saviour, for a deliverer, for someone to come and set everything right again.

The Second Advent

Matthew 1:21: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

God does exactly what He says He'll do, in a way that no one expects

Acts 1:9-11

1 Corinthians 15:20-26

Philippians 3:20-4:1

Revelation 19:11-16

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

1 Corinthians 15:51-55

With His Appearing

Loaded language: 'coming', 'appearing' - *parousia*

It means the presence of a deity that has been hidden until now, and is revealed, usually through some kind of healing,

or

It also has the idea of a king or ruler being present,

or

The coming presence of that King, the imminent arrival of the king in person.

"The first advent made it clear that God's rescue operation for humanity and the world had decisively begun but was not yet completed." – N.T. Wright

Revelation 21:1-4

Will you accept his invitation?

Questions for Reflection

1. What have been your thoughts about Jesus' coming at the first Christmas, and how it relates to the rest of the Gospel stories?
2. How have you considered Jesus' second coming in the light of the first coming? Is it something that you've thought about before?
3. Have you ever thought about the differences between the portrayal of Jesus in His two advents? How have you reconciled that?
4. What does it mean to know that God's redemptive work has begun, but is not yet fully completed?
5. How does this impact the way you live?
6. If the first advent of Christ is meant to draw us towards the second advent, what can you talk about or change in your Christmas traditions that can reflect this to those around you – family, friends and colleagues?
7. What is your personal response to Jesus' invitation of life, and to be a part of His victorious kingdom at His second 'appearing'?