

THE EMMAUS SERIES

1st Sunday of Advent, Year B

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8

1 Corinthians 1: 3-9

Mark 13: 33-37

Tear the heavens open and come down

Today we begin the Advent season. 'Advent' as we know means 'The Coming'. Already, when the gospels were written, the first Christians had begun to meditate on the significance of the Saviour's birth: the dawn of the world's salvation. The early Church celebrated Christmas in the depths of Europe's winter – probably because most people had traditions of special festivals at mid-winter. And as the days were beginning to lengthen, Christians were prompted to look forward to the springtime, when they would celebrate Easter, their greatest festival.

The feasts of Easter and Christmas are complementary. At Easter, the principal festival of the Church's year, we celebrate the great act of God - making the Risen Christ the source of the life and blessings that will transform creation into God's final masterpiece. It is not surprising that the Church's meditations on the 'dawn' that was the Saviour's first 'Coming' came to be associated with his 'Second Coming' when he will inaugurate God's final kingdom. Our advent liturgies weave together the themes of these two 'Comings'.

Many of the readings of Advent are from the final chapters of the Book of Isaiah (40-66). These chapters, coming from the time of the Exile, are filled with a renewed hope and confidence in the great future God has promised. Today's magnificent text is typical: 'You are our Father, our Redeemer ... tear open the heavens and come down ... we are the clay, you are the potter, we are all the work of your hand'.

One of the insistent themes of the prophets of Israel was 'The Day of Yahweh', when God was to come to rule the earth. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul affirms the Saviour's sharing in the fullness of divine authority, calling this final day, 'the day of our Lord Jesus Christ'. He tells his people that, in this present time of 'waiting', they should look forward to the Saviour's coming with confidence.

During the coming year, our gospel readings will be from Mark. Today's reading recalls a parable of Jesus, urging constant readiness for his return. We have no way of knowing how the end will come upon us. But the first 'Coming' of the Saviour – as truly one of us, born like us and sharing in what we all experience – makes it clear that we can look forward to the final 'Coming' with confidence.

John Thornhill sm