

**A PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF EAST ANGLIA  
FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT 2014**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Advent Sunday marks the beginning of the Church's new liturgical year. During this year, we will celebrate and be filled anew with the graces of the unique and historical events of God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ as our Redeemer and Saviour. The year reaches its climax in the Easter celebration of Our Lord's passion, death and resurrection.

These few weeks of Advent, are important for us as Christians. They are a time of prayerful preparation and joyful expectation.

First, they help us to prepare to celebrate and to witness to the moment the world had been waiting for since its creation – the birth of Jesus Christ, God's own Son - the moment God came to share in our humanity, so that one day we might share in his divinity. This is the truth that lies at the heart of Christmas.

Second, Advent also reminds us and prepares us to look beyond Christmas and Easter, to the moment Our Lord "*will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.*" At the moment of our death, Jesus will come to judge us personally and then will gently lead us on the road that will take us safely home to heaven. But there will also be the moment when all history will be wound up and completed – and all will be judged by God and his law of love.

Third, Advent reminds us to look out for and prepare for the coming of Jesus into our lives each day: in prayer, in the Scriptures, in the Blessed Eucharist, in the people we encounter and especially those in most need.

The three great figures of the Advent season show us the way in which we can prepare well.

First, there is the prophet Isaiah. He challenges us to live out in our lives what we believe in our hearts about God's love and mercy and justice. Through the Scriptures, he will challenge us to ask some uncomfortable questions of ourselves: *How can you help the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged and the hungry in our society today? How can you witness to the sanctity and dignity of human life? How can you work for justice in the world?*

Second, there is John the Baptist who challenges us to face up to ourselves and to turn away from mediocrity and sin – to open our lives and hearts to new vision and new purpose. He calls us to *Repent* – so Advent is a time when we should make our confession and turn our lives around.

And third, there is Mary. She challenges us through her life. She is so open to God, constantly reflecting on everything in her life through the eyes of faith. Faith guides her in all that she does. Our faith can never be just a compartment of our lives – it must be at the heart of all we do or think or say.

Our Diocese has begun its first Year of the New Evangelisation. This first year is a time when each one of us is asked to seek personal renewal or evangelisation. The prophet Isaiah, John the Baptist and Mary, the Mother of God, show us very profoundly how we can begin.

The New Evangelisation Working Party has also produced a leaflet for Advent which will be given out at the end of Mass for you to take away with you. It gives some ideas of how we can keep Advent and so renew and deepen our friendship with Christ. Under the headings of Pray, Study, Give and Share your Faith, we are asked to choose four things to do in our preparation for the celebration of the coming of Jesus at Christmas. They will also help us to prepare for the moment when he will come to judge us at the end of time and for those moments when we encounter him in our daily lives.

Assuring you of my prayers and blessing,

Yours devotedly,  
Alan S Hopes  
Bishop of East Anglia