

SERMON AT YORK: 28/11/99: GEOFF CHADWICK: ADVENT 1:

“ARRIVAL”

When I think of Advent, I sometimes think of arrival. Certainly, Advent is the “arrival” season when we think of how God comes or arrives in various ways. Arrival is a somewhat dramatic term when you imagine the ways “arrival” is often portrayed in drama, music, films or even in our daily lives.

Imagine the odd play you might have seen where someone important is about to enter the stage. Or an opera where the hero is greeted with crescendos and fanfare. Or where the villain’s entrance is highlighted with music of dread and impending disaster. There’s plenty to remember – the arrival of the queen of Sheba, the entrance of the diabolical ghost in Mozart’s “Don Giovanni”. In modern times the Phantom of the Opera arrives in awful splendour ”The Phantom of the Opera is here to change your mind...”). All sorts of dramatic arrivals are also found in films: ranging from violent Martian attacks on Earth to the all-conquering, all victorious outback Wild West Sheriff.

There are other arrivals as well. The ticker tape parade for the victorious Australian World Cup Cricket Team, or the Australian Wallabies with the World Cup. Think also of the rioting that will occur when the present visiting Cricket Team arrives back home!

Now I’d like you to think about your own arrival... or should I say arrivals. Arrivals like birth, and first day at school, or arriving on the doorstep of your first date, or arrival at the church on you wedding day, or even your arrival at church here today... What frame of mind were you in? What marks that event as something special? What was it like to arrive? What *is* it like to arrive...?

The Scriptures are full of references to arrival. In particular the arrival of God. There is a certain longing for God's arrival. The psalms express it well: "Restore us again, O Lord of Hosts: show us the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved" (Ps 80:7, NRSV). And in the Gospels: "Therefore keep awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come... (Mk 13:35, NRSV). This longing after God's arrival will be our constant theme for the next four weeks. During Advent we will encounter many Scriptures expressing a desire for God's appearance. These Scriptures will then culminate in the "arrival of arrivals" when we contemplate the birth of God as a human being in Jesus. But there is a paradox here – the "arrival of arrivals" is somewhat humble. There's no ticker tape parade, no great throng of people, no famous characters or people of standing – yes there is a bit of dramatic music "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" (Lk 2:14, NRSV) and some glory shining around (Lk 2:9)- but by and large Jesus' arrival was a great event shrouded in simplicity.

I wonder if the arriving God is like that often. When God comes, we seek operatic performances, stupendous events and ticker tape, yet in reality he comes in simplicity. Perhaps he comes whenever we come to a simple arrival within our own lives. Perhaps God was there at our birth, at our first day of school, at our first date, at the arrival at the church on our wedding day, or even when we arrived here this morning. Perhaps God arrives whenever we arrive.

Come Lord Jesus come...

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.