



**St Marylebone**  
*Parish Church*

**Advent 1, 2018 11am Choral Eucharist**

On the 12th day of Christmas my true love gave to me, 12 drummers drumming, 11, pipers piping, 10, Lords-a-leaping... You know the rest.

But it's *not* Christmas.

Today, together we have begun the great season of Advent. Advent has a different countdown...

On the 4 Sundays of Advent, Holy Mother Church gave to me – 4 La-last things: Heaven, Hell, Death and Judgement. The four last things, the traditional themes of Advent.

The countdown continues - 3 Comings of Christ.

Advent sharpens our focus on these: His first coming as the child at Bethlehem, His second coming at the end of the world – the coming He talks about in the Gospel given for today. Thirdly His coming now – in our lives today in so many ways and especially in each and every Eucharist.

That'll do for a countdown today.

4 last things and 3 comings are a much better countdown for Advent than maids-a-milking or chocolate calendars.

And before you throw me in the street as a modern-day scrooge. I don't say any of this to be a kill-joy. This is *Good News*.

Skipping Advent is such a loss. Personally, I find Advent one of the most spiritually nourishing and formative seasons of the Church's year. Time to begin again – it is the Christian new year.

These weeks can be so easily lost in Christmas shopping, office parties and trying to get everything done in time. The great themes of Advent, the 3 Comings of Jesus, the 4 Last Things of heaven, hell, death and judgement, if we let them, would take us deep into the really important questions of life: who we are? where we are going? what it means to be? and what for?

I suspect most of us have a Smart Phone of some kind. The CofE has released an app, for use each day of Advent. It's called 'A Good Advent'. Remember that, 'A Good Advent' and after Mass today why not download it for free? It has a piece of art, a reflection, a prayer for each day. It's written by the wonderful Jane Williams, a theologian in her own right and wife of former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. 'A Good Advent'. I commend it to you for the bus, before lunch, or while the kettle is boiling in the morning each day this Advent.

But you may be sitting there quaking: ‘what good is an app in the face of heaven, hell, death and judgment?!’ We have heard in today’s Gospel of that judgment. That we must be ready to stand before the Son of Man – Jesus the ManGod – on the awe-ful day. So to think briefly about this judgement.

We are living in the time between Pentecost and the Second Coming. We, in the age of the Holy Spirit, are living in the Last Days – although of course we have no idea long this time will last.

The description of this time, so far 20 centuries – ‘this generation’ as Jesus calls it in today’s Gospel – probably sounded familiar notes with us this morning. Foreboding about the state of the world, distress among the nations. We only need to turn on the news to see it happening.

But nonetheless, we do not know how many more minutes, or millennia, we will be waiting. But waiting we are.

Some days when I look at my to do list or diary, I must admit, I find myself thinking ‘Lord, if you could come before 11 today that really would be super’.

And now you’re really convinced I’m a loon. Not only, in the face of heaven, hell, death and judgment do I suggest you download an app – but now I seem to be actually *looking forward* to the judgment at the end of the world?!

To stand before the Son of Man, as we all will. But we must take from our minds any sense in which this is to stand before the Headmaster’s desk, or to stand in the dock before a high court judge. It takes a continual and lifelong process of

renewal but, brothers and sisters, we MUST dispense with the images of God we create that are simply divinized images of earthly fathers and earthly judges. *They* are named after God, not the other way round. It will be an awe-ful day, literally full of awe. And we will be judged. But the important thing is *by Him*. Him who poured out his life on the cross for love of us, Him who gives us His life in this Eucharist, Him who's Holy Spirit loves us into being every moment of every day of our lives.

In other faiths, as we have said before, there are rules to be met and a judgement made according to those rules. As Christians we do not obey rules of conduct in order to win enough gold stars to get to heaven. The judgment of which we will sing in a moment's time in the Creed is good news. We must be awake and ready, yes, looking and living for the Kingdom of God. Even now living steadfastly as subjects of a heavenly kingdom in which Love and Hope have finally unseated fear and darkness. So that we can stand before the Son of Man when He comes, when everything in us that is not of that Kingdom, will be burnt away in the fire of His love. Freed to be who we truly are, by the same love that caused Him to become one of us, to show us what God is like, in the beautiful weakness of a baby.

*That* is what Christian judgment looks like.

That is why the four Last Things are things of hope, not fear. That is why a good Advent is not to be missed. Safe in the joy of His first coming, let us meet Him as He comes to us now, and awake with hope for His coming again. The Bride Groom is coming, let us go out to meet Him.