

THE OLD CHURCH NEWS

OPEN TO ALL - OPEN TO GOD
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VICAR'S VOICE

A woodman went into a forest. The great trees surrounded him. They were tall and thick and strong. Most of them had been in the forest for hundreds of years. "I am sorry to disturb you," said the woodcutter politely, "but I can see that you great trees are the kings of the forest. I have a request to make. I need wood to make a new handle for my axe. I wonder if I could cut down a tree for this purpose. I don't mean one of you of course, just a small tree somewhere." The great trees were flattered at being spoken to in this manner and nodded their heads graciously. "You do not ask for much," they said. "Yes, you may take just one small tree. You may cut down that young sapling over there." The older trees nodded at a young ash tree which had not had time to grow very tall or thick. The woodman thanked them for their kindness. He walked over to the ash tree before the older trees could change their mind and with a few swift strokes cut it down. Then he sat down and made a fine new handle for his axe from the fallen tree. But as soon as his axe had been repaired, the woodman showed the old trees the real reason for his arrival. Wielding his strong, new axe, he cut down every tree that that stood in his path. He went right

through the forest, hacking and cutting at all the trees he could find, big and small alike. Before long most of the forest had been cut down. "It is our own fault," the few remaining trees cried in despair. "We have brought our deaths upon ourselves. We should not have stood by and let the woodman cut down that first tree. If we had protected that sapling we would have been guarding ourselves."

We of course need to protect the environment (the recent news of the danger for the ash tree is one particular cause). But what of the Church? Are we in danger of being "cut down" in this secular age, reduced to the sideline? As we prepare for Christmas, what does the Christian message really mean to those around us? Is the message of Advent (waiting and judgement) relevant to the world? It is our task as Christians to inform and to share. But what are we doing with divisions amongst the Church (and publicized as such), are we in danger of cutting ourselves down? And are we really nurturing the new in faith, as well as letting our own faith flourish? The woodman is about. And as we, once more, prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, do we guard the "forest" of our Faith?

LAST MONTH'S NEWS

An opportunity for remembering began during the Sunday morning service on All Saints' Day when the congregation was guided through a moving meditation during the sermon by Dr Ann Conway-Jones. The All Souls' services that afternoon and evening were well attended, enabling a peaceful time of reflection where candles were lit to the memory of departed loved ones.

Sunday 11th November saw the service of Remembrance commemorating the fallen in all conflicts. Don Sanders carried a wreath of poppies to the altar as the congregation stood

for the two minutes' silence and then Jean Hayes recited "At the going down of the sun..."

The Discoverers would like to extend a big thank you to our local PCSO's Julie and Matt who nominated them to receive a donation of £400 towards events and outings.

The Discoverers recently visited The Cone in Dudley. The day was spent with a tour around the glass museums where the young-at-heart Discoverers were treated to a demonstration of glass blowing alongside a group of somewhat younger school children. The day was rounded off nicely with a meal.

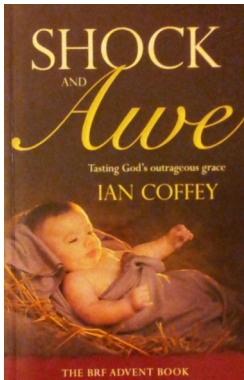
Q.I. "ADVENT"

"The bells of waiting Advent ring" wrote John Betjeman in his Poem called "Christmas" for it ends with this verse:

"No love that in a family dwells,
No caroling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this Single Truth compare –
That God was Man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine."

THE OLD CHURCH LIBRARY

You are welcome to borrow these new books for Advent from the library. If you prefer to purchase your own copy (£7.99 each) please speak to Jeff Guest



In these daily Advent and Christmas readings, starting on December 1st, Ian Coffey explores how God reaches out to us.

Starting with Abraham and concluding with the book of Revelation he sees how God chooses unlikely people and works in unusual ways.

Reflecting on what it means to a person of faith, trusting God's

promises and how some of the gifts of grace bring our encounters with Him into our life.

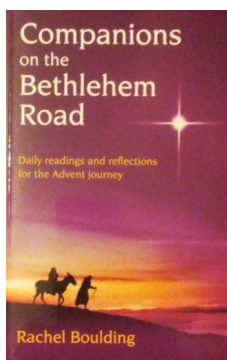
The Rev'd Ian Coffey is the director of leadership and training at Moorlands College.

It includes a section of optional material for group discussion over five sessions

In these daily Bible readings and reflections for Advent and Christmas based around spiritual insights gleaned from some of the best loved poets including Eliot, Herbert, Tennyson and Auden leads in a quest to discover how they wrestled with the same questions as us about God, Love, Hope and Suffering.

Rachel Boulding is deputy editor of the Church Times. Previously she worked at Church House where she helped to produce the Common Worship materials.

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DECEMBER

- 2nd **ADVENT SUNDAY** - Communion services 10.00 am in St Matthews' 10.15am in The Old Church each to include lighting the first candle of the Advent Wreath
- 12th **6.00 - 7.00 pm Carol Singing** at ASDA Cape Hill. All welcome to join in singing to raise money for charity.
- 23rd 10.15 am **Children's Nativity Play** at The Old Church
- 24th 4.00 pm **Crib Service** - All are welcome
- 24th 11.30 pm **Midnight Mass** (with carol singing before)
- 25th **CHRISTMAS DAY** - Communion services 10.00 am in St Matthews' 10.15am in The Old Church

Advent Calendar

by *Dr Rowan Williams*

He will come like last fall's leaf fall.
One night when the November wind
has flayed the trees to the bone, and earth
wakes choking on the mould,
the soft shroud's folding.

He will come like frost.
One morning when the shrinking earth
opens on mist, to find itself
arrested in the net
of alien, sword-set beauty.

He will come like dark.
One evening when the bursting red
December sun draws up the sheet
and penny-masks its eye to yield
the star-snowed fields of sky.

He will come, will come,
will come like crying in the night,
like blood, like breaking,
as the earth writhes to toss him free.
He will come like child.