

# A Message from Mary-Beth

Advent is often the time when we begin our crescendo of preparations leading up to Christmas. Each day children wait for something delightful to emerge from their Advent calendars and we burn our Advent candles down one more 'ring' as we draw enthusiastically closer to Christmas. We prepare for special services when our Church is packed with worshippers, young and old.

But this year, things are different. Social distancing and a ban on singing in Church have put a stop to our much loved, Advent traditions and services.

It's something that causes us to lament.  
We cry out, in the words of Psalm 80:

*Restore us, O Lord God of hosts,  
let your face shine (upon us) that we may be saved.*

The remarkable events of this year, punctuated by the crisis of the pandemic, have changed our lives beyond measure. And so Advent no longer resembles a period of preparing for the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

Instead, we can focus upon our faith and Jesus' second coming. The Bible says this will be a time of great tribulation in the world, but also of amazing power and glory as Jesus returns to save his people.

It's easy to look at our present circumstances and relate them to tribulation. Our past lives are gone and we live in a world of suffering and isolation.

As Christians, this can lead us into contradictory thoughts and feelings. We believe that God promises us redemption, salvation and peace. That's what we remember in our Advent prayers. But, as we look around us, God can seem distant. Where is He, in the midst of humanity's distress ? The tension this creates within us can be hard to reconcile. And yet, strangely enough, the stronger our faith in God, the more deeply we can feel this contradiction.

And this is what leads us ever more deeply into our Advent journey. Jesus calls us to be on the alert, to watch for signs of God's Kingdom and prepare ourselves for his second coming. We do this through our devotional life and our work of mission.

When you think of it, what better time to make this journey than the present, when the usual 'busyness' leading up to Christmas has been reduced to a slower pace?

May the living water of Christ fill and sustain you this Advent.

With every blessing,

Mary-Beth

