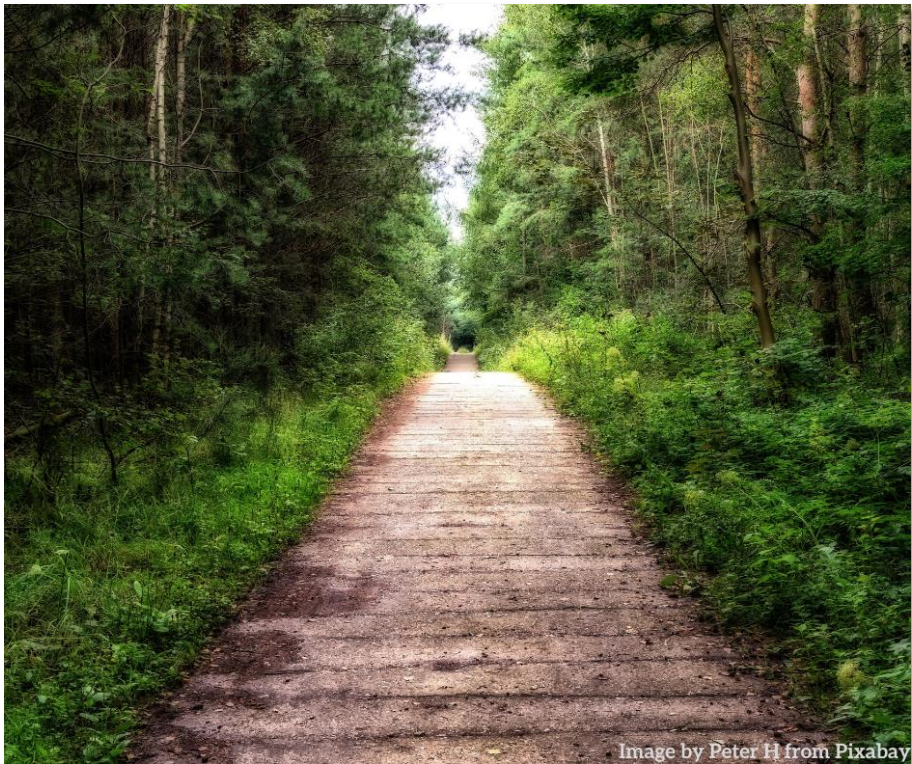




Alstonville Anglicans

Second Sunday of Advent

Sunday 5th December 2021



Sharing the Good Life

We acknowledge the Bundjalung people,
traditional custodians of the Land.
Our doors are open: LGBTQIA+ welcome here.
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About Advent

Welcome to Advent! Advent is the four weeks in which we get ready for the mystery of Christmas. Advent is a time of spiritual darkness for us where we are set free to engage with doubt and the shadow side of spirituality. I commend the following article by Barbara Brown Taylor for your Advent preparation. I would be interested to hear your thoughts in response to what follows below: Email me at priest@anglicans.live.

In Praise of Darkness

“Darkness” is shorthand for anything that scares me — that I want no part of — either because I am sure that I do not have the resources to survive it or because I do not want to find out. The absence of God is in there, along with the fear of dementia and the loss of those nearest and dearest to me. So is the melting of polar ice caps, the suffering of children, and the nagging question of what it will feel like to die. If I had my way, I would eliminate everything from chronic back pain to the fear of the devil from my life and the lives of those I love — if I could just find the right night-lights to leave on.

At least I think I would. The problem is this: when, despite all my best efforts, the lights have gone off in my life (literally or figuratively, take your pick), plunging me into the kind of darkness that turns my knees to water, nonetheless I have not died. The monsters have not dragged me out of bed and taken me back to their lair. The witches have not turned me into a bat. Instead, I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.



The problem is that there are so few people who can teach me about that. Most of the books on the New York Times "How-To" bestseller list are about how to avoid various kinds of darkness. If you want to learn how to

be happy and stay that way, how to win out over your adversaries at work, or how to avoid aging by eating the right foods, there is a book for you. If you are not a reader, you can always find someone on the radio, the television, or the web who will tell you about the latest strategy for staying out of your dark places, or at least distract you from them for a while. Most of us own so many electronic gadgets that there is always a light box within reach when any kind of darkness begins to descend on us. Why watch the sun go down when you could watch the news instead? Why lie awake at night when a couple of rounds of Moonlight Mahjong could put you back to sleep?

I wish I could turn to the church for help, but so many congregations are preoccupied with keeping the lights on right now that the last thing they want to talk about is how to befriend the dark. Plus, Christianity has never had anything nice to say about darkness. From earliest times, Christians have used "darkness" as a synonym for sin, ignorance, spiritual blindness, and death. Visit almost any church and you can still hear it used that way today: *Deliver us, O Lord, from the powers of darkness. Shine into our hearts the brightness of your Holy Spirit, and protect us from all perils and dangers of the night.*

Since I live on a farm where the lights can go out for days at a time, this language works at a practical level. When it is twenty degrees outside at midnight and tree branches heavy with ice are crashing to the ground around your house,

it makes all kinds of sense to pray for protection from the dangers of the night. When coyotes show up in the yard after dark, eyeing your crippled old retriever as potential fast food, the perils of the night are more than theoretical. So I can understand how people who lived before the advent of electricity — who sometimes spent fourteen hours in the dark without the benefit of so much as a flashlight — might have become sensitive to the powers of darkness, asking God for deliverance in the form of bright morning light.

At the theological level, however, this language creates all sorts of problems. It divides every day in two, pitting the light part against the dark part. It tucks all the sinister stuff into the dark part, identifying God with the sunny part and leaving you to deal with the rest on your own time. It implies things about dark-skinned people and sight-impaired people that are not true. Worst of all, it offers people of faith a giant closet in which they can store everything that threatens or frightens them without thinking too much about those things. It rewards them for their unconsciousness, offering spiritual justification for turning away from those things, for “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

To embrace that teaching and others like it at face value can result in a kind of spirituality that deals with darkness by denying its existence or at least depriving it of any meaningful attention. I call it “full solar spirituality,” since it focuses on staying in the light of God around the clock, both absorbing and reflecting the sunny side of faith. You can usually recognize a full solar church by its emphasis on the benefits of faith, which include a sure sense of God’s presence, certainty of belief, divine guidance in all things, and reliable answers to prayer. Members strive to be positive in attitude, firm in conviction, helpful in relationship, and

unwavering in faith. This sounds like heaven on earth. Who would not like to dwell in God's light 24/7?

If you have ever belonged to such a community, however, you may have discovered that the trouble starts when darkness falls on your life, which can happen in any number of unsurprising ways: you lose your job, your marriage falls apart, your child acts out in some attention-getting way, you pray hard for something that does not happen, you begin to doubt some of the things you have been taught about what the Bible says. The first time you speak of these things in a full solar church, you can usually get a hearing. Continue to speak of them and you may be reminded that God will not let you be tested beyond your strength. All that is required of you is to have faith. If you still do not get the message, sooner or later it will be made explicit for you: the darkness is your own fault, because you do not have enough faith.

Having been on the receiving end of this verdict more than once, I do not think it is as mean as it sounds. The people who said it seemed genuinely to care about me. They had honestly offered me the best they had. Since their sunny spirituality had not given them many skills for operating in the dark, I had simply exhausted their resources. They could not enter the dark without putting their own faith at risk, so they did the best they could. They stood where I could still hear them and begged me to come back into the light.

If I could have, I would have. There are days when I would give anything to share their vision of the world and their ability to navigate it safely, but my spiritual gifts do not seem to include the gift of solar spirituality. Instead, I have been given the gift of lunar spirituality, in which the divine light available to me waxes and wanes with the season. When I go out on my porch at night, the moon never looks the same way twice. Some nights it is as round and bright as a

headlight; other nights
it is thinner than the
sickle hanging in my
garage. Some nights it
is high in the sky, and
other nights low over
the mountains. Some
nights it is altogether
gone, leaving a vast
web of stars that are



brighter in its absence. All in all, the moon is a truer mirror
for my soul than the sun that looks the same way every day.

Barbara Brown Taylor is the author of "Learning to Walk in the Dark" (HarperOne), from which this piece is excerpted.

Liturgy for 5th December

Sentence of the Day

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will
break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and
in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of
peace. Luke 1.78-79

Collect

God of our salvation,
you straighten the winding ways of our hearts
and smooth the paths made rough by sin:
keep our hearts watchful in holiness,
and bring to perfection the good you have begun in us.
We ask this through him whose coming is certain,
whose Day draws near, your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Readings

Luke 3:1-6

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'

Messages

Pastoral Care



To make you smile...

We all know about Murphy's Law: anything that can go wrong will go wrong. But have you heard of Cole's Law? It's thinly sliced cabbage.

Pastoral visits Remember!

If you or anyone you know is ill or in hospital, please let the office or Lynne Watt our Pastoral Care Coordinator know. Also, if you do visit anyone could you email Lynne? wattlg@bigpond.com.

Mothers Union: third Monday of each month. Contact Pam on 0417 258 991 or Joyce 0407 690 874 joyce@stephanies.com.au .

Community Engagement



Community-On-the-Verge

Help yourself to what is ripe and ready for picking. If you are keen to be involved as the garden evolves, please contact Alan Larsen on 0409 655 123 or Barbara Fewtrell 0429 385 713.

- Community on the Verge (CoVe) will be hosting a table at Bunnings Ballina Christmas markets **Thursday 9 December. Join us from 6pm!!!** Lots of fun activities for children and a free sausage sizzle.



Play Place

Play Place Thursdays 9.30am – 11.30am.
Play Place Christmas Party is on 10 December 5.30pm.

Online ministry

Head to Anglicans Live YouTube channel to catch up on any of our discussion or service videos you may have missed. Have you subscribed? Get your friends and family to subscribe at: Anglicans Live YouTube channel.



Sew Helpful

Sew Helpful meet every 1st and 3rd Monday in the Ministry Centre.



Christmas Dinner in the Church

To celebrate being back in the Church together, there will be a Christmas Dinner in the Church on Saturday 11th December at 6.30pm. The cost is \$20.00. The event is now fully booked with a waiting list.

If you have booked a seat and are not able to attend, please let Jenny know as soon as possible on 0416 285 140. Money can be given to Carol Vidal at the Friday services or Jenny Noble at the Sunday service.

Good Governance

Finance: Supporting Alstonville Parish

Parish Provider is now Planned Giving

Have you thought about how your day is simplified if you are not having to remember to bring your cash/cheque offering to church? Planned Giving takes this pressure from you.

Our office staff can assist you to complete the new Planned Giving form. Simply bring your bank account details in with you for assistance.

Parish council will continue to promote electronic giving as the normal way. We pray for a day when every parishioner in the parish will embrace this method. Before Christmas we will be writing to you asking that you to embrace this way forward to ensure a stable future for Alstonville Anglicans.

Luke 6:38 "Give and it will be given to you."

Mowing roster: We have had some people drop off the roster, and therefore need to request another couple of men or women to join the Roster. You will only need to do a few

turns per year, in teams of 2-3 people. Please contact Barry Campey on 6628 3089 if you can assist.

Worship and Spirituality

Invite your friends for Christmas



From our family to yours
COME AS ...YOU

24 Dec 5PM FAMILY SERVICE
24 Dec 11PM CAROLS & Communion
25 Dec 9AM CHRISTMAS SERVICE

Alstonville Anglicans

anglicans.live

Save the date!



YOU ARE INVITED TO

ADVENT CAROLS AND READINGS

12 DECEMBER 9AM

with your friends at
ALSTONVILLE ANGLICANS
St Bartholomew's Church

Jeremiah 33:14-16 & Luke 21:25-38

“WATCH WAIT WONDER”

All over the world, there is a very keen desire to put 2021 behind us and to move on. People want to get back to what life was like before COVID created so much disruption. We have carefully watched the introduction of some relaxation of regulations as vaccination rates have climbed through the targets of 70% and 80% and 90%.

It's great to now be singing in our Churches but we all would like to be able to take the next step and to sing with masks off. How fantastic it would be to have no restrictions in our church. I personally really look forward to being able to share the Chalice at Communion. I would love to be able to drive into Queensland and have a whole of family gathering on the Gold Coast. How good it would be to be able to see a show at the Lyric Theatre at Southbank.

But just as we were starting to see some light at the end of the COVID tunnel, we are now being warned about a new COVID variant emerging in Southern Africa. Many people will be unsettled and distressed by this. Most of us just want to get on with our lives as normally as possible.

So, we watch! And we wait! And we wonder!

Carol and I arrived back from Canberra on Thursday after a long two day trip. We lived in Canberra from 1975 to 1985 having bought our first house in the suburb of Torrens. At that time Torrens was the most southern suburb but Canberra now extends many kilometres further south. There's been lots of changes but we remember the city well.

The drive from Canberra to Alstonville is a long one which symbolises the journey from our past life to the present. One home to another. The generation of our young children starting



school to the generation of our grandchildren. It was literally a trip from our former Navy life to our present retired life.

Looking back to those years in Canberra stirred memories of some tough times. In the Navy, I was often away for long periods. We had the sadness of burying our third child (stillborn in 1976). However, there were also some times of joy and creativity, young energy, parties and celebrations. These are all reminders of times past and the transformation of our lives into something new and different.

During the drive from Canberra, I was also able to think of the things ahead; preparing to be leading and preaching in today's service. I was able to think of our family Christmas plans being still unclear because of the uncertainty of crossing into Queensland. I have hopes that sometime from December or January good things will be possible as COVID regulations ease further and international travel gets going again. Carol and I even have a vague plan to make a trip over to NZ with friends.

Canberra has been a significant part of our past as have a few other places. But we are not there anymore. We are back here in Alstonville. The future lies ahead but the future is yet to unfold. "Que sera, sera!" I don't know exactly what is going to happen, but there will be surprises, challenges, hopes and joys along with disappointments.

So, four Sundays before Christmas, in our traditional churches all over the world we come to Advent. The liturgical colour is purple and we have an Advent wreath. We begin year C of our Lectionary which will be dominated by readings from the Gospel of Luke. Luke presents a story of journey. The journey of Jesus. The journey of disciples. Clearly Luke encourages us to journey in faith!

Our first Advent reading is from the end of Luke and puts us right in the middle of Luke's version of what Jesus has to say about the end of time.

The academics are fairly sure that Luke was a doctor and a historian who wrote this Gospel shortly after AD 70 (around 40 years after Jesus was crucified). Luke wasn't a Jew and he wrote for a Gentile Church which was already able to look back over the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the beginnings of the Church, the end of Israel's glory in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the start of the Christian mission to the ends of the earth. Luke says he has investigated all these stories of Jesus carefully and has decided to write an orderly account of all these things.

But Luke's Church had travelled a long way from its roots in Israel. It was now firmly in place in the Gentile world; in Rome and beyond. The Christians that Luke was writing to were at a turning point in history. They were between the wonder of the past history of Jesus and his Church, and his future coming again as the Son of Man.

Advent is time to turn our attention to God's coming into what has been, what is now, and what is yet to be. Advent is God's activity. God's way of entering human history. We celebrate the way God has acted in the past. We think about the way God seems to act or not to act in the present world. And we wonder just what God will do in the future.

Advent reminds us that although there is presently sorrow and grief in the world, there is also great possibility.



God wants the world to undertake a journey from the past into a time that is yet to come. God is saying, "be ready for something new!" We are asked to go on a journey from days now gone to a destination in the end of time.

On this first Sunday of Advent, we also hear a passage from Jeremiah, "the weeping Prophet", who is preparing God's people for the time to come. Jeremiah understood all the upheavals of this time leading up to the exile in Babylon to be God's judgement. He gave a difficult and unpopular message about the complacency of religious people and their over-confidence in the covenant (the solemn agreement God had made with his people through Abraham). In this passage, Jeremiah says "ultimately Judah will be saved and God's promises will be fulfilled in justice and righteousness". The return from exile will bring in a new line of rulers for God's people who will trace their ancestry back to King David. The new name for Jerusalem will be "The Lord is our Righteousness" to show that the city is finally showing a holiness which is appropriate for people living in a covenant relationship with God.

Jeremiah is saying, "Beyond disaster lies a hope based on a relationship which God is willing to uphold".

Then, in the reading we had today from the Gospel of Luke, we have Jesus saying that the people will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. This is a hugely symbolic image; we shouldn't expect a news story "last night in London there were clouds and a man in the sky".

BUT, the message presented in this symbolism is critical. Jesus will return and he encourages us to be ready; to be alert at all times.

Jesus says this because he knows that many people in our troubled world will not be ready for Him when He comes again. Many people will be distracted. Many will be busy with other things. Some people will have become tired of waiting. Even in our churches, there are people who say they don't believe that Jesus is going to come again anyway.

We frequently pray "Come Lord Jesus!" and it will happen sometime. Before then, some tough times are forecast. But Jesus doesn't say "Keep your head down, strap yourselves in and hang on tight!" Jesus says, "When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near"

The "things" Jesus is talking about happening are the signs of trouble; strange events in the sky, people being afraid, really bad weather. Some academics say that what Luke says in verse 25, "distress among nations confused by the sea and waves", refers to the rise and fall of national states. All of those things; nations rising and failing and other tragic things that we can worry about, make us realize that we have to depend on God. They are all signs to tell us that Jesus is coming again.

Each time you hear the things that often worry us (the things about nations collapsing, wars and storms and floods and drought, sickness and death, money problems and family worries) let each of them be a sign for you. Let them be a sign that says, "Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near ... Jesus is coming!"

We would like to be ready to meet Him. Let's keep our heads up!

So, we watch. We wait. We wonder.

ANGLICAN PARISH OF ALSTONVILLE

Ministers all the baptised!

Rector The Reverend Dr Desiree Snyman
0402 764 969 priest@anglicans.live

Associates	The Reverend John Kidson	0411 394 213
	The Reverend Geoff Vidal	0447 645 456
	The Reverend Doug Bannerman	0418 182 450
	The Reverend Greg Ezzy	0412 660 742

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The Anglican Op Shop

1 The Avenue, Alstonville **Tel:** 6628 8777

Dates 5th to 12th December

- 5th Dec Sunday 9am Holy Communion in the Church
- 6th Dec Monday 10am Anam Cara Praying for You
Parish Office 9am-12pm
Op Shop 9am-3pm
- 7th Dec Tuesday Parish Office Closed
Please refrain from visiting the Parish office on a Tuesday. This time is set aside for staff to work uninterrupted. Thank you.
- 8th Dec Parish Office 9am-12pm
Op Shop 9am-3pm
Anam Cara 9am
- 9th Dec Parish Office 9am-12pm
Op Shop 9am-3pm
Thursday Anam Cara 6pm
Bunnings Ballina Market stall for Community Garden 6pm
- 10th Dec Friday 10am Holy Communion
Parish Office 9am-12pm
Play Place Christmas Party 5.30pm
- 11th Dec Christmas Dinner in Church 6.30pm
- 12th Dec Sunday 9am Advent Carols & Readings