



## Advent

This week, the time of Advent starts. Maybe you have an Advent calendar, to count down the days until Christmas? Because that is what Advent is about: it's about waiting, about getting ready, for the coming of Christmas, for the coming of baby Jesus. That is what the word *Advent* means: coming.

We get ready in different ways: we might decorate the house and put up a Christmas tree, we might make or buy presents, we might write Christmas cards to people we are thinking of, especially at this time, to tell them about how this year has been for us, and to wish them a happy Christmas time.

But Advent is about more than these – it's about preparing ourselves, getting ourselves ready. In the Christmas story in the Bible, an angel appears to Joseph in his dreams, and tells him that the baby to be born will be *Emmanuel*, which means 'God is with us'.

At Christmas, we remember the story of the birth of Jesus, so long ago in Bethlehem. We have a nativity play to act out the story, we hear the different versions read in our services, and with this craft bag, you have an opportunity to explore different parts of the story: to build your own nativity, to count down the days of Advent, to make stars, and to bring light.

Although Jesus was born such a long time ago, in a country far away from our own homes, the story still matters to us today: why else would we celebrate it every year? It tells us some truths that are there for all of us: that God is with us, in the world, knowing us and loving us, every single one of us, just the way we are – and every single day, not only at Christmas. At Christmas, we celebrate this love that God gives us, and can share it with those whom we love. That's why we give each other presents, to show we value each other and want to make each other happy. That's why we send the cards, to tell people we're thinking about them. John, one of the Gospel writers, doesn't talk about the stable and the manger, not even about Mary and Joseph: he describes the birth of Jesus as light coming into the world.

This year has been difficult for many of us: school were closed and we had to learn from home, maybe our families were worried about how to continue doing their work, maybe we were worried for our own health and that of the people we love. We've not been able to travel as much as we might have liked, and perhaps, some of us haven't seen grandparents, or aunties and uncles, for a very long time.

That all doesn't change suddenly, just because it's Christmas: although now, there's new hope on the horizon with the development of vaccines, which might help us to contain and control this virus, so that the restrictions can hopefully be lifted before too long. But even though Christmas might look different from usual, even though we might not have the usual parties and the Nativity service, and meet up with all our loved ones at Christmas: the truth of Christmas doesn't change.

God loves us, each single one of us, just as we are: and at Christmas, we can celebrate this love, and share it with all around us: those who are close-by, and those further away.

Happy Advent!