On dictionary definition of advent is ‘looking forward to the arrival of a person or thing’.

At advent, in the Christian calendar, we look forward to the birth of Jesus. But you could rightly point out that Jesus has already come, so what should we focus on now?

We need to keep the Christmas accounts of the gospels close, as a reminder that God was prepared to act in a way that John describes: **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life John 3:16**.

Yet, for many, if not most people, the first arrival of Jesus is forgotten, ignored or an irrelevance. Why look to a God whose world seems out of control – with natural disasters, disease and the man’s sin going unchecked.

Is that your view, or are you tempted to believe that?

It is certainly the viewpoint of many people and surprisingly also the viewpoint of at least one who should have known better.

In 2002 Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a best-selling book entitled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

The essence of the book is that God is all loving but not all powerful, that He is good, but not sovereign. So, when bad things happen to good people, it is because events are out of God's control.

Kushner advises his readers to "learn to love God and forgive him despite his limitations." Yet, Kushner is misguided at best - this is not the God of the Bible, as Isaiah points out.

**SLIDE Isaiah 59:1**

**Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.**

In Isaiah’s day and now, people wonder why God does not rescue them from their trials. Has God’s power reduced – His arm is too short, or His ear too dull? This questions God’s power and knowledge.

As believers, you may struggle with that question, but I trust that you do not believe it is fact. How can there be a God of love and all power when there is human suffering?

It was there that Kushner moves away from God’s Word to say that God is not in control, but it is there that Isaiah speaks about why suffering continues.

The real problem, says Isaiah is our iniquities have separated us from God. It is our own sinful actions and thoughts that have created the gap between us and God.

It separates us in terms of:

* Fellowship - we no longer are aligned with God’s thinking.
* Blessing – we are not trusting God and relying fully on Him.
* Protection – He allows trials to come our way to correct us.

It is often easier to blame someone else, without actually admitting the fault lies with yourself.

The result of that attitude and lifestyle, as Isaiah says is **justice is far from us… We look for light, but all is darkness! (59:9).**

God will not bless those who are not walking closely with Him and to do that we need to have God’s justice within us. It is the same principle as Jesus stated in **Matthew 13:12 Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.**

But the real solution is a continuous message throughout the Bible -confess your sins and admit your guilt and to those who dos so, God promises that **The Redeemer will come… (59:20).**

**SLIDE Isaiah 59:20-21**

**"The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the LORD. "As for Me," says the LORD, "this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."**

The Redeemer can be translated as kinsman-redeemer, amongst whose duties included to buy a fellow family member out of slavery **Leviticus 25:25.**

Overall, the kinsman-redeemer was responsible to safeguard the persons, the property and the posterity of the family.

That is what advent is about, because Jesus is our kinsman-redeemer. He was already God, but in being born, He added humanity, so he could be a close kinsman.

Isaiah 59:20 could be written, "I will send My Messiah, the Redeemer for all humanity, Jesus of Nazareth!"

But the Redeemer has limitations. He will only come to those who turn away from wrongdoing and He will only work, as was the case in Isaiah’s time, for those who asked for His services - they acknowledged they needed Him.

So, Isaiah chapter 60 comes out of the darkness of 59, by stating;

**SLIDE Isaiah 60:1-3**

**‘Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. 2See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.**

God is announcing to the people that their Redeemer has come, but there is a need to respond to Him.

For those around at the time of Jesus’ birth, there opportunity lay, either as being the shepherds who received the message from the angel, or by being those that the shepherds went and told.

As believer’s we need to adopt the attitude of the shepherds as they spread the news about the arrival of God’s Messiah, our Redeemer.

But we also need to move beyond that first advent and look towards Jesus’ return, which Isaiah describes.

**SLIDE Isaiah 59:4-13**

**4‘Lift up your eyes and look about you: all assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. 5Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. 6Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord. 7All Kedar’s flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple.**

**8‘Who are these that fly along like clouds, like doves to their nests?
9Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish
bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honour of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour.**

Isaiah talks of the treasures that will be present in the Millennial Kingdom, which we as believers will also enjoy.

Isaiah writes about the regathering of the Jewish people to the Land, in ways that could not refer to previous returns. He mentions that people will return, flying like a cloud, possibly referring to aircraft, which would have been outside Isaiah’s understanding when he wrote.

The regathering of the Jewish people to Israel today, should give us an extra expectation and urgency to be ready for Jesus’ return.

Isaiah talks about the wealth that will be willingly brought in acts of worship, honour and praise to the reigning King, Jesus. In this case, he talks about the riches of his day – the wealth of the sea, herds of camels with gold and incense, as well as flocks.

Why is there such generosity? Because they recognise they are giving it to God.

Everyone will bring their offerings, whilst **proclaiming the praise of the Lord**. There will be a universal acknowledgement of God for who He is – our Sovereign Creator and King.

This place will one where God Himself supplies all the light – His glory will be absolute.

The glory displayed by the angels as they announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, was just a small glimpse of how it will be after Jesus’ second coming.

**SLIDE Luke 2: 13-14**

**13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”**

A question for you to think about this coming week? Does the Lord’s peace rest on you, as one on whom His favour rests?

We need, therefore, to have the favour of God. But how?

**Hebrews 11:6** says, **without faith it is impossible to please God**.

The people who will enjoy the peace of God this Christmas, will be those that have truly trusted in Jesus to be their Messiah. That means putting Jesus at the centre of everything that you do, say or think.

It means, as Isaiah was saying over 2,500 years ago, to repent of where we have drifted, to come back to God, to sit under His justice and mercy.

In doing that, we can as Paul says, come before God and by putting everything by prayer and supplication to Him **Philippians 4:6-7**.

When we do trust the promises of God and have joy and peace and love, then God is glorified.

The angels sang, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom his favour rests. God’s offer was made to everyone - from every people, tongue, tribe, and nation - who would believe.

The shepherds accepted, the Magi as the first Gentiles accepted. Make sure you are with them this advent.

**OFFER / PRAY**

**In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place while[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%202&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24976a)**] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to their own town to register. 4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.**

**8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”**

**13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,**

**14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”**

**15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”**

**16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**