

Watch!

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
Revd Linda Anchell

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1Corinthians 1:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

Show us the light of your countenance O Lord, and we shall be saved.

It's Advent Sunday and the first of the candles in the Advent wreath has been lit. The Candle of Hope.

At the 10am service we welcome Belinda Young to her place among us as Children's ministry co-ordinator. A new phase has begun of a special ministry in the parish. Welcome Belinda!

And we focus on the Christmas Bowl appeal. **DO** collect your envelopes!

Today we start a new liturgical year.

It is a New Year. Year B in the 3 year lectionary cycle; the year we read the gospel of Mark.

By the way: it doesn't take a whole year to read Mark. An afternoon sitting will do it and it is worth taking the time!

A New year... when does a new year start? November 30th? December 1st? strange timing. this is definitely not January the 1st!

A bit of history ... I'm sure Ray mentioned something about the change in England from the Julian to the Gregorian Calendar; the reason for different dates for Easter between the orthodox and Western churches. In England, the change was done by an Act of Parliament and it did more than just put the calendar into synch. It also changed the date of the New Year!

[From [Andrew Benham's Web Site](#)]: This change was as a result of an Act of Parliament—the [Calendar Act](#) of 1751 *An Act for Regulating the Commencement of the Year; and for Correcting the Calendar now in Use*.

What isn't so widely known is a second change which the Act introduced—as named in the first part of the Act's title. The Act changed the first day of the year (or, if you want to impress your friends with a new word, the Supputation of the Year).

Prior to 1752 in England, the year began on 25 March (Lady Day). Lady Day is one of the Quarter Days, which are still used in legal circles. The Quarter Days divide the year in quarters, and are: Lady Day (25 March), Midsummer's Day (24 June), Michaelmas (29 September), and Christmas (25 December).

So, in England, the day after 24 March 1642 was 25 March 1643. The Act changed this, so that the day after 31 December 1751 was 1 January 1752. As a consequence, 1751 was a short year; it ran only from 25 March to 31 December.

But that was in England. Rome had had a January 1st date for the start of the year which is why January is named for Janus, the two faced god who looks backward as well as forwards. Just how we decide to make a start on a year is one issue. How we mark it, what we do about it is another.

Does all the washing and ironing have to be done? Is it a time to reflect on the old year past, and the new one to come? Chinese and Jewish custom has a decent period either before or after the New Year for reflection and special visits. Rosh Ha Shanah,

New Year, is followed by Yom Kippur. China was in chaos over this last New Year as heavy snow stopped travel!

We still hold to New Year resolutions, but it isn't a strong custom, it isn't an important festival. So now, in Advent, we have a New Year. not just a new day; but a whole year beginning. a new beginning.

One year, New Year's Day came (the ordinary one, January 1st) and I was angry. I was surprised by my anger, but I was angry that it was now 1995. No longer 1994. I should have been relieved. A shocking year had finally drawn to a close. My parents had died that year, I left work, unable to continue (and *after I left* I got sick!). [That was when MS was diagnosed. Chris said I should have put that in!] Christmas had come and I thought I had settled down; then here was the new year bursting in upon us and I had to realise there was a new thing happening, a new possibility, new work (of sorts) to be sorted out. I was stuck in the agony, the depression, the grief, of 1994. I didn't feel ready to move on!

But, of course, I had to. I was still alive and relatively healthy and the sun rose the next day and there were indeed new opportunities, new horizons. (and that brought me to St Philips!) I had "kept going", but I wasn't willing to "move on". And the New Year propelled me into it.

Advent is a time of preparation. A time to prepare for Christmas. Perhaps four weeks of reflection about who and what we are. A time to prepare notes for the clergy appointment board, and a time to value and remember the blessings which Rob gave to us.

Do the readings help us in any way?

The gospel for Advent Sunday this year is in Mark's "mini apocalypse", delivered just before the events of the betrayal at Easter. In the other years, when we read Matthew and Luke, we read similar passages.

There is plenty of use of the word "apocalypse" in the news these days. We know it all too well. We destroy so easily! We don't need a *god* to cause all that destruction, we can do it for ourselves!

Apocalypse means unveiling. What is it that needs to be unveiled so that we can see? Our eyes need to be unveiled so that we can see god in these events, with us.

For the next three Sundays the gospel stories are focussed onto the Christmas story.

"God breaks open heaven's doors and comes down through the back door of life in hovels, cow-cribs, and swaddled clothes." [found in the [Goshen College devotions](#). This one is by Jim Brenneman]

This week's readings and psalm have a strong prayer in them for god to *come*. and in Advent we sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

(Emmanuel meaning "god with us")

Come....

we recognise our need, and ask for god's presence with us.

This week, we get a *PROMISE*.

"Heaven and Earth will pass away," says Jesus, "but my words will not pass away."

There is a hope, a promise of something more; something deeper; deeper than anything we can imagine. Something we cannot destroy with our greed or fear or anger.

And there is a task: Watch! The disciples will need to do that in the events of the next few days in the gospel story. We need to continually do it now. Watch. We will see hints of god in our daily lives. Look for them, treasure them, share them.

Watch! Keep Awake!

[or]

As Daniel will sing (10am, during communion)

"Comfort ye, Comfort ye, my people!"