



St Mark's Church, Reigate

December 2019

Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton

Dear Friends,

We don't really have to wait for anything, these days. Apps downloaded on a smartphone keep us updated as to precisely which trains have been cancelled or are running late. They can tell us how long our journey by car will take. Technology enables delivery companies to predict to within 30 minutes when the parcel will arrive. We no longer need to look out expectantly for the arrival of a letter from the person we love, since email is instantaneous. Once, an international phone call had to be booked in advance and the family waited for the appointed time to wish a daughter in Australia a happy birthday down a crackling line. No need to wait for that now. We're told that we can 'take the waiting out of wanting' if we only sign up for a credit card. A properly organised life, using all that the most modern technology has to offer, needs no waiting. This is just as well since we're all so busy that waiting seems to be a frustrating waste of time. Instant gratification can be ours. We also crave certainty and so we desire control over our future lives. This need to exercise control is borne of fear and anxiety about the unknown. We want to do things that will bring about our desired ends at a time and in a manner of our own choosing.

We are entering a mysterious, poignant, wonderful time of waiting in the season of Advent. A dark time of the year with short days and little sunlight. We wait, in the darkness, for the day when we celebrate the birth of Christ in that holy night, when the Word became flesh. Advent is a season of penance as we prepare to welcome the baby who was to become the Saviour of the world.

We can be sure that the 25th of December will arrive. But Advent is also a time for remembering that we are awaiting the Second Coming of Christ: that is open-ended waiting. In this waiting, we must have faith that Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again. We must give up control and trust in God's perspective of time. In holding that trust, we might take the opportunity in this season of Advent to trust also that God's perspective includes plans for us. We can have no control over this process but must let our infinitely patient God define our lives according to his unending and unconditional love of us as individuals. Henri Nouwen said that "we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy or prediction. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world pre-occupied with control".

It is not easy to let go; there is a fear that, if we do, we might drown, or get lost, or fall off a cliff. In this season of Advent, in the darkness, we might pray for faith that we are held in God's hands and that we may trust the unknown enough to enter it.

With every blessing.