

Last Saturday evening I went to the Saffron Hall to hear Harry Christophers and The Sixteen in a concert of choral music. Half the parish were there, too. If the scrum at the bar was anything to go by, I think they are often are. When it came to Mozart's *Laudate Dominum* - a transcendently beautiful piece of music - the soprano soloist stood up and drew a deep breath. That moment, between the breath and the first note, is Advent. Why? Because it is bursting with expectation, with anticipation of what is to come.

Advent is a time of 'what is to come', of waiting and listening. We have one ear cocked for the sound of the Lord's footfall... we strain to hear his coming. Every moment of life is Advent, whether we recognise it or not. The modern-day spiritual writer Fredrich Buechner puts it beautifully-:

"In the silence of a midwinter dusk, there is a sound so faint that for all you can tell it may be only the sound of the silence itself. You hold your breath to listen. You are aware of the beating of your heart. The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment."

Which brings us back to the moment just before the soloist begins to sing. Or when the conductor has raised his arms but has not yet brought them down to bring the orchestra in. The German Dominican Meister Eckhart wrote:

"In silence and in darkness, the Eternal Word leaps down from heaven to be born in time; but what good is that if it doesn't happen in me? If it does not *happen in me*, what difference does it make? The birth must happen in me - everything depends on that."

Advent is the moment just before Christ leaps down from eternity to time, to be born in the Bethlehem of our hearts. Advent is always 'just before.' This 'just before' is always happening- it is never not happening. Christ is never not being born, never not dying and rising again. And it includes everything that exists, from a blade of grass to a galaxy, with neither beginning nor end. It is. It is a truth that we are charged to proclaim by our manner of life in a world that hates-waiting, a society that despises 'the moment before'. It gorges itself on instant and immediate satisfaction: self-basting turkeys, Christmas pudding flavoured gin by Heston Blumenthal and with weeks of prepping, cooking and freezing for a meal eaten by half-a-dozen people that one third of the world could never afford.

I want to end with a poem by Lawrence Hall, that sums it up beautifully:

Advent remains at peace, unoccupied
There are no Advent trees to buy or steal
No seasonally-discounted lingerie
No Advent hymns background the lite-beer ads
At Mass: a wreath, a candle every week
And music set to God, not to the sales;
The missal now begins again, page one
And through the liturgy so too do we
Almost no on notices this season, and thus
Advent remains at peace, unoccupied.