

The goal has already been scored. The match is won. Here, where we are, we are living through the slow-motion replay.

The divine Child is already born. He is never not being born. The Bethlehem manger is a representation in our time and space of an eternal reality that transcends all time and space. In the middle of the calamitous 14th century, the Lord said to Julian of Norwich: 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and every manner of thing shall be well.' In a way we cannot presently understand, everything already *is* well – even in the calamitous 21st century.

The Bethlehem manger is the rag-and-bone shop of the human heart: everyone's, even though so many do not know it. They fill the manger with rubbish – but the Christ-Child is still there. Meister Eckhart said: in the stillness and darkness, the Eternal Word leaps down from heaven to be born in time – but what does that matter if he is not born in me?

The sun is never not shining. It is always there, unmoving, even at night and in winter, where some people, some of the time, can't see it. Seen or unseen, it is still there. We often draw the curtains of our self-preoccupation against God's sun, but it goes on shining.

Despite the great hymns of the Church fathers, despite two thousand years of theology and all the trillions of words it has produced, Advent is a time of waiting for the everyday, the ordinary, the humble and the small. The great and glorious is there: but the angels sang and the star shone only because there were shepherds, sheep and cattle. The true magnificence of the divine birth is found in a place of straw, cobwebs and animals' breath.

Because Advent is a time of waiting, our contemporary society prefers to ignore it. It doesn't do waiting, it doesn't like it, waiting makes it feel uncomfortable. Everything has to be instant, immediate, now. Advent teaches us that waiting can be holy,

contemplative, nourishing. This kind of waiting is what has been called 'the sacrament of the present moment.'

I want to end, like last week, with a quote from the American theologian Frederick Buechner:

“What is coming upon the world is the Light of the World. It is Christ. That is the comfort of it. The challenge of it is that it has not come yet. Only the hope for it has come, only the longing for it. In the meantime we are in the dark, and the dark, God knows, is also in us. We watch and wait for a holiness to heal us and hallow us, to liberate us from the dark. Advent is like the hush in a theater just before the curtain rises. It is like the hazy ring around the winter moon that means the coming of snow which will turn the night to silver. Soon. Very soon. But for the time being, our time, darkness is where we are.”