



The Bishop of Norwich
The Rt Revd Graham Usher

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of Norwich

24th November 2021

A letter to be read in each of the churches of the Diocese of Norwich during Advent.

Advent 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

Advent marks the beginning of the Church year. We begin again the annual cycle of hearing and praying the story of Salvation in the birth and ministry, passion and death, resurrection and ascension, of Jesus Christ.

Our Christian pilgrimage is a journey into the life and company of Jesus. I invite you to seek to live out our diocesan vision to be **“Transformed by Christ”**.

To be Transformed by Christ inspires us to be **Prayerful, Pastoral** and **Prophetic**. All three ‘P’s’ are powerful words, full of promise and potential, and they will help us navigate the route along our journey of holy transformation.

Will you come with me on this journey? It is not another programme, not another project, not another ‘thing’ to *do*. In fact, much more than more ‘do-ing’, I see this as a gift to ‘*be*’ more, to inhabit more fully and completely our lives as baptised children of God.

Our new Vision is simply inviting us to build on what we, as disciples of Christ, are *already* doing – being open to God through prayer, being open to the needs of those around us through pastoral care and being open to issues of justice near and far through finding our prophetic voice.

With the beginning of Advent, we will be focusing during the course of this next year on the *first* of those ‘P’ words – *Prayerful*. We could not begin with anything better, for everything flows from prayer. Advent’s weeks of watching and waiting are such good ones in which to begin *deepening* our prayer.

At a time when we can often feel overloaded, and there is a pandemic ‘scratchiness’ around, how good it is to remember that the most important - yet simplest - thing we can do to prepare for the transformation brought by the Christ-child is to let prayer ready our hearts for his arrival.

But our journeying together towards living more prayerfully goes on long after Advent. Our churches already have many wonderful resources at our disposal to help us to pray but some new ones – specifically for us in this diocese – have been produced to help us in the weeks and months ahead.

There's a poem ... a new hymn ... some notes for preachers ... and various prayers and suggestions for how they might be used. All can be found on the diocesan website. In addition, do sign up for this year's digital Advent Calendar: each of the 'windows' will reveal a different person from across this diocese, sharing with us the particular ways of praying. A wonderful opportunity to be inspired daily an incredibly rich variety of prayed-in lives.

I see this year's journey into deeper prayerfulness as a great gift. It is a gift offered to each one of us, to each congregation and to the diocese at large. An invitation to journey with me and each other into the mystery of God. As Bishop Jane, Bishop Alan and I travel around the diocese during this next year, we will be keen to hear from you what you are discovering about prayer. And to *learn* from you.

Every blessing as you travel through Advent and open this gift in the coming weeks.

+ Graham Norris: