



TAKE THE WAITING OUT OF WANTING

A MEDITATION FOR ADVENT

By Archbishop George Stack

The shops have been decked for Christmas for over a month now. The TV Christmas advertisements have been bringing tears to the eyes over the same period of time. Although it hasn't yet been announced if Tesco's or Lidl's, Waitrose or Sainsbury's have won the "competition" for the most nostalgic advertisement of all. Surely the judges should remember that nostalgia isn't what it used to be. And surely the prize for the worst possible taste (excuse the pun!) must go to Greggs the bakers for its weird juxtaposition of placing a crusty sausage roll in the crib instead of the Christ child. A spokeswoman for Greggs said *"We're really sorry to have caused offence. This was never our intention"*. What was their intention then? To show a total disregard and disrespect for one of the deepest mysteries of our faith? And replacing a Jewish child in the crib with a pork sausage roll? How much did Greggs pay their advertising executives for that particular insight? An opinion poll run by the Daily Telegraph attracted more than 3000 votes, two thirds of them declaring the image offensive. No Greggs mince pies for me this year!

So here we are at the beginning of Advent. It is a season of 'Watching' and 'Waiting', 'Hoping' and 'Seeing' but, above all, of 'Believing'. These themes are repeated time and again in our prayers and hymns during this beautiful time as we make our own the extraordinary prophecies of Isaiah – not least *"... the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light"*. (Isaiah 9:2) The world seems pretty dark at present and needs the Christian virtue of hope more than ever. It is no accident that we celebrate the birth of the *"Sun of Justice"* (Malachi 4:2) at the darkest time of the year. All this is made possible through the response of Mary to the message of the angel and her 'pondering' on the word of God, her desire to 'treasure' these things and 'store them up' in her heart.

"Take the waiting out of wanting" is a contradiction of all that we try to do during Advent as we *"... wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ"*. The slick advertising message tells us that waiting is a waste of time and wanting is the ultimate good. The Christian life teaches quite the opposite. It teaches no time is wasted in which God is served. The service of God, our

discovery of God afresh, in new ways, in the changed circumstances of this year, is the sanctification of time. Purposeful expectation, seeing and hearing things anew, bringing the loving revelation of God to bear on the life of each person, different this year to what they were a year ago. Another thought for Advent.

"You keep us waiting.

You, the God of all time

Want us to wait

For the right time in which to discover

Who we are, where we must go,

Who will be with us, and what we must do".

(Iona Community Worship Book)

The great spiritual writer W. H. Vanstone spoke powerfully on the subject of "The God who waits". He writes that God himself has chosen to wait on us, to be a receiver of our attention, to place Himself in our hands. But we have to be prepared to give time to the sights and sounds and signs of God revealing himself in the most unexpected ways, sometimes through the most unexpected people. Looking beyond the immediate, searching deeper than the obvious, gracing each moment and every action with a word of thanksgiving and praise. In this way *"... the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight"*. No other way.

The seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany offer the time and space to do these things. They remind us of the words of T.S. Eliot who speaks of attentiveness to the love, waiting to be surprised by the joy of God in these words:

I said to my soul be still,

And without hope.

For hope would be hope

For the wrong thing;

Wait without love.

For love would be love

For the wrong thing.

There is yet faith.

But the faith, and the love, and the hope

Are all in the waiting.
