

## FROM OUR MINISTER

Dear Friends,

As a child I avidly followed the Apollo moonshots with my amateur astronomer father. I loved the TV coverage by people like Patrick Moore and James Burke. And nothing was more exciting than the countdown to lift-off. As the NASA Public Affairs Officer took us through the sequence, various procedures happened in preparation for the launch. The swing arm retracted from the rocket to the gantry at T minus 5 minutes. At T minus 3 minutes the whole process became automated. Ignition kicked in a T minus 10 seconds. And then the magic words: 'Lift-off! We have a lift-off!'

It's not unreasonable to see Advent as our countdown to the coming of Jesus - but perhaps that is not so much a lift-off as a landing! Perhaps I should have gone with the whole 'The Eagle has landed' sequence!

But I chose the countdown to lift-off scenario because of all the events that happen in preparation for that auspicious moment. And I suggest Advent is a time for us to ponder our preparation for the coming of Jesus. What are we doing to prepare?

I'm sure you realise that when I ask that question, I do not mean, have you bought your presents? Have you got your mince pies ready? Do you have enough wrapping paper? No: are our lives ready for the coming of the Messiah? In the New Testament, very few people are ready. Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, but hardly anyone else. The arrival of the Messiah, so long anticipated, largely caught people on the hop.



We cannot be ready for the birth of the Messiah, because it has already happened. But we can aim to be ready for when 'he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,' as the Creed puts it. This doesn't mean devising half-baked end-times timetables, but it does mean putting our lives in order. Just as many people put their financial affairs in order when they know that their death may be imminent, but we are called to put our lives in order in readiness for Christ's appearing again.

And that's why the theme of Advent Sunday (1<sup>st</sup> December this year) is traditionally that of Jesus' Second Coming, not his Incarnation. It is in that sense that Advent is a season of preparation for us. All of life should be a preparation for the age to come for the Christian, but Advent especially reminds us of that.

Now that may be unsettling for us, but God has not stopped being gracious and merciful to us in Christ. We prepare for Christ's coming, not out of fear that God will reject us, but out of anticipation for the great day.

It is no accident that the New Testament describes this in terms of a wedding between Jesus and his Bride, the Church. We are used to the idea of getting ready for a wedding: well, that's the call of Advent.

So - in what areas of our lives, under the mercy of God and with the help of his Spirit - do you and I need to make more preparations this Advent? May the Holy Spirit prompt each one of us.

Your minister and friend,

Dave Faulkner



1 You can read the transcript for Apollo 11's lift-off and also download MP3 files of the audio at <https://www.nasa.gov/history/afj/ap11fj/01launch.html>