

## Advent 3 – Denise Smith

So here we are in advent 3 already.

I looked up the word Advent in several different dictionaries and the word varies slightly in all of them. It ranges from something or someone coming to the arrival of someone of noble birth to looking at greater things happening in the future.

So why does advent fill me with fear and all the emotions in between up to joy and happiness?

To find out why I have had to look back at previous advents to understand why my emotions are all over the place at this time of year.

I am 5 years old and I been given the part of Mary in our school Nativity play. It seemed like the day would never come when we would perform in front of our parents or grandparents as back then all were invited. Finally the night had arrived and I was excited and scared - what if I forgot my lines? But I was delighted to be in my Mary costume.

Joseph and I walked around the school hall "No room, No room" till we were eventually invited to sleep in the stable on the centre stage. It was here where Joseph spied his mum and dad and gave them a quick small wave, but where were my parents? I frantically scanned the parents, then just as the lights dipped I spotted them. This was just as the angel Gabriel passed baby Jesus in between Joseph and myself, so I gave them a quick wave. Thankfully Joseph caught baby Jesus by his leg and swung him into my arms. I quickly wrapped him up in a fleece blanket and with my heart beating rapidly prayed no one had noticed. Then the thought struck me - what if they had? We would be booed off the stage! But it seemed no one had noticed because taking Joseph's hand and still holding Jesus we walked forward and we got the biggest loudest applause of all - well it seemed like that to me.

Fast forward I am now a mother myself to 5 children and pregnant with a 6<sup>t</sup>. So my advent seems to be an endless round of shopping, wrapping up presents, hiding them out of view of inquisitive and excited children and going over their school lines for their school plays. One child insists on running round the house

with a sheet over his head, as his school is acting out the Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens and he is taken with the ghost of Christmas past. Why I don't know because he hasn't got that part - I think it was to try and scare the other children myself.

Then trying to not to argue with a 4 year old who insists that the line in Away in a Manger is "The kettle is blowing and the baby awakes" – it is the new version not like when you was little, Mummy! To this day I can still hear that line sung by small children. They were all good though in their school plays and I beamed from ear to ear as I applauded them with tears in my eyes .

I have now got 3 boys and 3 girls and we live in a small cul de sac of just 6 dwellings, so it was the children's job to listen out for the round table Father Christmas float.

They had to learn about charity and children that also needed to receive a present at Christmas, that maybe hadn't got parents etc. So they had to choose a suitable coin out of their own money boxes to give to Father Christmas and also hand their wish list to him. So the night arrives and we go up the cul de sac and wait for the float to come down. Now the baby was 9 months old and although he liked the lights of the float, Father Christmas was a very scary man so he hid his face in my shoulder and I took a step back. An elf gave me a knowing look so she took the money note from my out stretched hand and placed it in the bucket for me.

Walking back up the close the children are discussing this event when I hear one child say "well Mum doesn't care about the children - she just passed her wish list to an elf and didn't put a suitable coin in Santa's bucket. So what do I say to that?"

The children are going to come carol singing with me and the church around the local streets, so the youngest two stay at home with dad as it is a very cold night. Walking up to join the other carollers, I warn my children that I want to hear them singing the carols correctly and not "we three kings of orient are ; John in a taxi p Paul in a car" or "highly flavoured gravy gloria". If I heard one wrong word there would be no hot chocolate with marshmallows on returning home, just straight to bed! All I heard was them occasionally giggle so I think they sang them right .

Every year the children helped to make a Christmas cake - this was their contribution to Christmas. So once it was cooked and marzipanned, then it was up to them to rough ice it and decorate it however they liked. So over the years we have had a ballerina kicking Father Christmas under his chin, a reindeer sniffing the snowman's bottom (well boys will be boys ). We have had a very bright red one, also a bright blue one, when they went overboard with the food colouring. I not sure what the neighbours thought when invited round for a pre Christmas drink and the children wanted them to taste their home made Christmas cake. If they were shocked at the sight of a green iced cake with a blue baby Jesus, lying in a red manger they never said anything but still applauded the children's efforts and all agreed it was the best cake ever.

Now leading upto Christmas day it was the children's turn to say grace at the dinner table and it had to include something to do with what the message of Christmas really means .

Our eldest child prayed for people everywhere, even those on the other side of the world who also would be celebrating the birth of Jesus because he is the king of the world. And our youngest now 18 months said Amen. I silently rejoiced that the message was coming across as a tear rolled down my cheek .

So to church on Sunday the children go off to Sunday school and I am at last alone to hear all about John the Baptist's message of repentance and that our Saviour was coming. I needed to hear this message; I needed to repent; I needed to look forward and I found I had got goose bumps. I needed this short time for myself. Then the children were back showing me the present they had made and the drawings they had done, then walking home to "while shepherds wash their socks by night ".

Well it's almost Christmas and they are allowed to be children after all. Now my Advents are a lot less hectic and somewhat quieter. But I have now got the grandchildren telling me all about the meaning of Christmas "its not just about eating mince pies Nan, there is a lot more to it than that ".

I look back and I can see that the advent season holds all the emotions I have felt over the years. Fear, hope, peace, love and joy ,as that great carol Oh little town

of Bethlehem says itself - The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight .

Happy Advent

Amen .