

“I am the Alpha and the Omega - the beginning and the end,” says the Lord God. “I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come - the Almighty One.”

Revelation 1:8 (New Living Translation)

We are at the turning point of the year, in many ways. At the end of November, we began the season of Advent, as the Church moved into its new year. This ties in with the completion of our sermon series on the Gospels, and we move on to look at the wider content of the New Testament. We have also seen the completion of the Foundations For Ministry course, which many members have participated in during 2009. And once we hit December, then I for one am ready to enjoy Advent and begin to think about Christmas.

Writing for a combined December and January edition of the magazine makes me think about this season as a whole. In Advent we prepare, at Christmas we celebrate, and in the New Year we resolve, or covenant, or plan, (or whatever is your custom) – for the year ahead. This is also the turning point – quite literally – of our planet’s orbit, as we approach the sun once more, and the days lengthen, and the temperature rises (we hope!)

It’s an obvious and slightly corny metaphor, but as we turn once again to face the sun, perhaps we should do the same with the Son. I wonder if the recession this year will cause many people to be more restrained at Christmas, and maybe give a little more thought to what we already have.

At Christmas we remember the greatest gift possible. Not just in theological terms, but the simple human truth of God sharing his life with us, of being among us, taking time and effort to experience our pain and offer us his comfort. Whatever is on your Christmas list, the one gift you cannot buy is the love, presence and support of family and friends. God offers this to us in a way that far exceeds our human relationships.

At the end of the year, we look back and remember. Not only the good times, but also the way God has brought us through the difficulties as well. Advent is a season of reflection, a time of waiting. Before you rush headlong into all that must be accomplished before 25th December, just pause, remember and be thankful. Pause to consider the source of our celebrations; remember the message of hope that this season brings to our troubled world; and be thankful that someone took the trouble to make us aware of that good news.

This year, we are using an initiative from CMS called *Share The Light* to help us offer that good news to others. Special invitation candles can be bought, to use as a gift, a message of love, and an invitation to a Christmas service. Please consider using this opportunity to offer one of your friends a way to reflect on the past year, and maybe to make a very significant change in the year that lies ahead.

May you have a joyful and peaceful Christmas, and an exciting and rewarding New Year,

Revd Anthony.