

Dear Friends,

In the words of Bing Crosby 'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas.' In some shops the displays went up before Halloween! The countdown has begun.

How are your preparations looking? Personally, I have done very little so far, but that is not unusual. The season of Advent that began on the 3rd of December is used to prepare for Christmas and, yes, I do mean the buying of presents, the ordering of festive food and the decorating of our homes.

Although such things are important, more importantly our time is for preparing ourselves to receive Christ into our everyday lives and not just for Christmas.

In a world that can seem all too uncaring and disconnected, filled with hate and selfishness, it is vital that we do not forget that our humanity is bound up in one another - it is what connects us to our families, friends and communities and, most of all, it is through Christ being born as a human baby that connects us to him. Over centuries humanity has torn the fabric of our connectedness.

Advent is a time for repairing that fabric. The sight of a vulnerable infant makes us discover our own vulnerability and responsibility towards each other.

We recognise that my welfare is bound up in your welfare and the welfare of the community. As John Donne said, 'No man is an island'. Christmas means that God is involved and that he is a God of mercy and new beginnings. But before any new journey can enthuse us about its destination, we must be willing to take that first tentative step forward.

There is a Gaelic proverb which states 'Nothing is easy for the unwilling'. Without willingness the journey will be impossible. Before compassion there needs to be a willingness to want to be compassionate. Before transformation there must be the belief that transformation is possible and a willingness to be transformed.

I would like to invite to you join me and the congregation of St Mark's on this journey through Advent and celebrate with us not just at Christmas but in 2018 also.

I wish you a blessed Advent and Christmas,

Rev'd Fiona