

Sermon on Advent Sunday, 8.00am

By Rev. Bill Church

The Prayer Book instructs us in Advent to use today's Collect, for the first Sunday, every day until Christmas Eve. This shows us that Advent, like Lent, is to be kept as a season, a whole series rather than a single day.

The Russian Church keeps Advent as "the lesser fast" (Lent is the "great fast") but even so, it is supposed to be a time of quite strict and severe self-denial, not something we aspire to, nor would we be likely to keep it these days.

But we do try to keep it as a period of preparation for the advent – the coming – of the Lord at Christmas – an opportunity to cast off the works of darkness, to check that, in our lives and in our actions, we are in a fit state to welcome Christ, to celebrate his incarnation, his coming to live as one of us.

The Gospel for today – Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem – seems out of place liturgically, but I suppose it is about another advent, another coming, to a place, a city, which he loved and which should have been steadfast in its welcome, but where in the end his enemies contrived his death. Just as this advent comes before Christ's entry into a place, this world, which he loved and which should have been steadfast

in its welcome, but has also proved to be very mixed in its reception.

To make our welcome more worthy of his love, Paul urges us to cast off the works of darkness, like some dirty clothes, to throw them into the washing basket and put on a clean change of clothes, ready joyfully to meet the Christ child at Christmas.