

Assembly 8 December 2008

The greatest adventure

We all enjoy an adventure. When we leave Hong Kong to go on holiday we often say that we are going on an adventure. If you look in the Oxford English Dictionary, the word adventure is defined as 'an unusual, exciting and daring experience'. It can also mean 'excitement arising from or associated with danger or risk'. An adventure gives us a special feeling of excitement, with great expectation about what is about to happen. Sometimes we are nervous before starting out on the adventure; we might also be a little scared. But the anticipation of what will take place keeps us excited and looking forward to the adventure that lies ahead.

Last week the Chaplain mentioned the word Advent. The word Advent is derived from the Latin word 'adventus' which means 'arrival'. Put simply, it means that Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour, is about to arrive. Advent is a time of waiting for the arrival of Christmas, the coming of Jesus to Earth when he was born as a baby in Bethlehem a little over two thousand years ago. During Advent we recall the history of God's people and reflect on how the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament were fulfilled.

Of course, the word Advent is related to the word Adventure. Like being on an adventure, Advent is also a time of excitement, anticipation, when something out of the ordinary will take place.

There have been preparations for Christmas here at school. Last Friday evening we turned on the Christmas lights above the main entrance. Many of you have been designing Christmas cards that will soon be available in print and on-line formats. I also imagine that some of your teachers have been looking at ways of bringing the Christmas story to your classrooms.

If you attended Church yesterday, you will have noticed some changes. The colour of the robes worn by the priests had changed from red to purple. The Bible readings centred on the Christmas story and the congregation sang Christmas hymns and carols. You see, the beginning of Advent is the start of a New Year for the Christian Church. This might come as a surprise as many people think that the Christian calendar starts on the 25th December; Christmas Day. But the Church year actually begins with the first Sunday in Advent, that is, the last Sunday in November or the first Sunday in December.

Advent is a time to celebrate light in the midst of darkness. We use candles to celebrate this time of waiting with one additional candle lit every week during the Advent season. Candles symbolise the Light of God coming into the world through the birth of His son, Jesus Christ.

Last week we lit one Advent candle at the start of the assembly. This week two candles will be lit and so forth. The four outer candles represent the period of waiting during the four Sundays of Advent. The first candle is the Candle of Hope, the second the Candle of

Peace, the third the Candle of Love and the fourth the Candle of Joy. Traditionally, the fifth and central candle is lit on Christmas Eve to signify Jesus the Light of the World. As we will not be at school on Christmas Eve, the fifth candle, which is always white, will be lit at the Carol Service on the last day of term.

At the Carol Service we shall sing special songs about the birth of Jesus. The most famous carols were written in Europe about 150 years ago, around the time that St. Paul's College was founded. Indeed, I imagine that these new songs were very popular amongst the first students at SPC, particularly *Away in a Manger*, *Silent Night* and *O Little Town of Bethlehem*.

Advent takes us on an adventure. It is a journey through the Christmas story. The nativity scene before us depicts the baby Jesus lying in a manger, watched over by his mother and father, and in the presence of animals and kings. The season of Advent is a time of preparation for the arrival of Jesus Christ. It is the greatest of all adventures.

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