

Dear Friends,

The Northern Lights or Auroras are certainly a sight to behold. According to the Met Office website, here in the UK we are generally further south than the aurora belt occurs which is normally in Norway, Iceland or Greenland. This is probably why there are various tours which allow people to see them when they visit these places. Due to various weather conditions, they have been witnessed in this country, and also here in Colchester, in recent weeks and months.

As we approach December, the longest night and shortest day, I found myself thinking about some of the characteristics of the Northern Lights. They are bright, distinctive, highly anticipated and not always seen, depending on the weather. December is where we look ahead through Advent to Christmas and celebrate Jesus' birth who God sends to earth in human form to be Emmanuel - God with us.

I found there may be some things we can learn for our Christian journey through the Auroras. Advent is a season of expectancy, preparation and waiting. It is a season we are often keen to rush through as we look ahead to Christmas. Yet, it is also a time to savour. We can get so lost in rushing ahead to the 'big day' that we don't take proper notice of the present moment. A time of anticipation enables us to reflect both on the present and the time to come, to bring the two together and to find the richness that comes from this. The Northern Lights are always expectantly anticipated but, for some who have travelled for many miles, that period of waiting isn't always filled with the sightings of the Northern Lights they hope. We are assured and promised of coming to Christmas Day, that we will be able to celebrate Jesus' birth once again and so we can rest in the anticipation without it becoming an anticlimax.

The Northern Lights are very distinctive. We only have to look at the photos people took and shared of the skies to see the glorious array of colours there were. It was newsworthy because it was different. Today, as Christ's disciples, we are called to offer something distinctive to the world. We should show others through our actions and attitude what it means to us to know the grace and love of God in our lives. In a country where people are less likely to profess a faith than in previous decades and centuries, we should not be afraid to be distinctive and to show others the difference Jesus makes in our lives.

Sometimes the Northern Lights are not always seen. Sadly, this can maybe be said about some Christians as well. It's not always easy to speak of our faith, but Advent and Christmas are some of the times where it is easier to do so. It is the time where the real message of Christmas can be shared with others, through social afternoons, in schools, care homes or any number of other settings.

During this season of Advent and Christmas, whatever the weather may be like, let's take the opportunity to wait for Jesus' birth with expectancy and anticipation. Let's shine the message of light into a world in need and let the bright light of Christ shine in the world around us in a distinctive way once again.

Advent and Christmas blessings to you all,
Chris