

# Advent Message

## Bishop Gregory, 2021



It is a great pleasure once again to be joining you at your worship on Advent Sunday and to be offering an Advent Message.

As you know Advent Sunday is the first Sunday of the church's year and it has been my wont for some years now to speak to you directly about my hopes for the coming year and for our journey of faith.

In the Psalms that I was reading this morning, there was a lovely image of what it is to experience God. It is rather like, said the Psalmist, going on a dry and dusty journey and suddenly you encounter a stream of water, gushing from the rock, cold and clear, refreshing and energising after a time in the dust and in the heat of a desert crossing. That image of God being able to refresh us, is the image which inspires me for our life as a church in this coming year. When people come to our churches are they refreshed? Do they find a place of cool and of refreshment? Do they find the opportunity to be put in touch with God?

For some years now we've had a diocesan focus, Unlocking Our Potential, based on the fact that the diocesan coat of arms, which has been with us for hundreds of years, is formed of two silver keys on a black background. Unlocking Our Potential has served us well but now, after Covid, as we go into 2022, what is church life going to be like? When we reflected on this in Standing Committee, we did some work and asked the questions: "What are our churches really here for? As we move into the future, what is at the centre of our life?"

In the end, we identified three themes. They are there in the New Testament, in the teaching of Jesus and in the life of the early church. They are there in the letters of Paul and in the Acts of the Apostles. We believe that the church exists for three things:

**To grow faith**

**To bring hope**

**To demonstrate love**

We begin with the idea of faith. We come to church in order to encounter God and so as we focus our life on 2022, we can ask the questions: How much do people feel they're having a real encounter with God? Are they being blessed? Is their faith being deepened when they come to our worship? Are those who visit us given the chance to drink in the peace and holiness of our ancient churches, the beauty of our worship and to receive an experience of God's goodness?

If people want to learn how to pray more successfully or to learn more about what it is to believe the Christian faith and to follow Jesus, where in our churches do they find those resources? We exist to grow faith.

But I also believe that the Christian community ought to a place of hope. We ought to be optimistic about the future. After all, we believe in the God who holds the future, who is in control of our destinies and who offers the gift of eternal life; an eternal life which starts now. So, are we as Christians, are we as a diocesan family, people who are optimistic, who touch the lives of those around us, bringing the promise of hope and joy and love and peace with us? Do we grow faith? And do we bring hope?

And finally, our faith should never be about words. Our faith should be about action and in Jesus we see the person who concentrates not on the religious, not on the wealthy, not on the proud but on the poor, on those who mourn, on those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. On the children, on the widows, on those on the edge of society, on the poorest and the outcast. Are we a church that demonstrates love? Are people helped by the work we do? Are people enabled to become more themselves because we love them?

So, these are the focuses for our future. We are called, you and I, to be people who grow faith, who bring hope and who demonstrate love. We will be reminded about this focus for our diocesan life and purpose in all our publications and communications. These are the three core values which we have to represent and live into, to be a people who are growing faith, bringing hope and demonstrating love. For this, thanks be to God, Amen.



**ESGOBAETH LLANELWY**

TYFU **FFYDD** • DOD Â **GOBAITH** • DANGOS **CARIAD**

---

GROW **FAITH** • BRING **HOPE** • DEMONSTRATE **LOVE**

**DIOCESE OF ST ASAPH**