

# Choosing sides

Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 21:25-36

Advent is a time of looking forward but it is also a time of contradictions and paradox. It's a season of hope and excitement for those who look forward to Christmas as a festival to be enjoyed with people they love. It's a season of hope and excitement for Christians looking forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. It's a time of sorrow and darkness for many who face Christmas for the first time, or for the twentieth time, without a loved one. It's a time of sober reflection and preparation for Christians who also look forward to the day when Christ returns in glory "to judge the living and the dead" and to establish his kingdom which will know no end.

Jesus talks this week about distress among the nations and fearful events that will shake heaven and earth. These are the signs by which we will know that the kingdom of God is near and, for Luke, this is a time not of judgement but of redemption, another cause for hope and excitement.

As Jesus speaks of the uncertain, changeable and temporary things of our world, he also speaks of the certainties that we can believe in and prepare for. The words of Jesus "will not pass away" and through prayer we will be given the strength to withstand all that threatens our bodies, knowing that our souls are redeemed and belong with the glorified Son of Man. ☺



Lord Jesus, as we look forward to celebrating your birth among us, give us the wisdom and faith also to prepare for your return so that when that day comes we will be ready to stand before you in your risen glory. Amen.

## Keeping Christ in Christmas Part 4 – Christmas spirit

by Heather Cooke

The decorations may have been up for weeks, and the retailers are in full swing, but today is the day when the Church begins its countdown to Christmas on Advent Sunday. Or rather, the first Sunday of Advent – because Advent doesn't start and finish today.

Advent, the period of waiting for Christ's coming into the world, lasts from today until Christmas Eve. But although those dates mark the

beginning and end of the season, it doesn't end there. We're all part of a greater Advent season, as we wait for Christ's coming again in glory.

Soon everyone will be getting into the Christmas spirit, wanting to celebrate. Whatever form that celebration might take for us this year, we can truly enter into the Christmas spirit this week, and keep the Christ in Christmas, by remembering what we really have to celebrate: the memory of God's coming in Jesus, and the hope of his glorious return. ☺

## Plants of the Bible – The oak

by Caroline Fletcher

Many species of oak grow in Israel, together with a similar tree, the terebinth, also translated "oak". Reaching impressive ages and sizes, they became landmarks. Hence we are informed that Abram had a divine revelation near the oak at Moreh and Gideon under the oak at Ophrah.

People sat under the oak's spreading branches to shade from the sun. However, those same broad branches caused the bloody downfall of King David's rebellious son, Absalom, when his flowing locks became caught up in them!

Isaiah 11:1 famously mentions a "shoot... from the stock of Jesse" (King David's father). This image comes from trees such as the oak which when felled, produce new growth from their stumps. Isaiah is encouraging Israel that despite the ravages of war, hope remains: as stumps produce new life, so a deliverer will arise from the remnants of David's line. To Christians, this is Christ. ☺

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

Psalms 46:10