

300 Celebrate Advent? Are you sure?

Approaching the season of Advent, I'm reading *On Earth as in Heaven*, a compilation of extracts from Tom Wright's books relating to the seasons of the church's year, so I turned to Advent, and it began to make more sense. I feel I can now really celebrate Advent!

The word 'advent' means 'coming' and, as one website says, '*Advent is the season of reflective preparation for Christ's Nativity at Christmas and Christ's expected return in the Second Coming.*' The first 'coming' is OK; we can certainly celebrate God coming to earth, but how about the second?! Can we celebrate *that*? Are we looking forward to it? Why or why not?

Well, I follow Tom's insistence that God's Big Plan is **not** taking people *away* to a lovely place called 'heaven', away from the awful mess of earth. No, the Plan – which sort of got going with Abraham – was to sort out the mess here. The world, the universe, was created good, a place where God could live with his creation (heaven on earth), and God is on a long-term mission of total restoration of earth, then God will come and live among us.

So what is the Second Coming? It's God's sure promise, God's covenant: heaven *will* come back to earth, God in Jesus *will* return to bring his reign of justice and joy and peace and love, and we will worship God in our renewed, restored earth.

But I have one slight niggle. It's all very nice for me, but what about my unsaved husband/wife/children/friends? This is actually where I started^[1] with trying to help my friend 'Martha', whose church tells her that the answer is evangelism. Try to persuade them, before it's too late. Well, you can see the logic: they are heading for hell, they don't know it, we should tell them – indeed, shout at them – to try to get them to realise! That's certainly what any church I've ever been in has taught.

Pushing logical arguments isn't always the best idea, but it's how I work – an analyser and problem-solver. So try this logical progression, and prepare to be shocked.

The Bible uses the image of Jesus as the bridegroom and with us as the bride, so imagine a king whose son falls in love with a commoner and wants her to be his bride. An envoy is sent to invite her: come to the palace and marry the prince! You'll be given all the wealth and status of a princess – you'll **be** a princess. But you don't have to; we're not compelling you; the prince loves you and you're free to accept or not. However, the wedding date is set, and if you refuse you'll be thrown into prison and tortured – but it's your free choice.

Is that really a 'free' choice? And is that what God is like? Is that what Jesus was like on earth? Maybe I'm mistaken, but isn't this effectively what we've always been taught?
Comments?

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