

Holy Advent Anglican Church Armadale

Advent Sunday 27 November 2011 Yr B Feast of Title & last Sunday in the Church building.

Isaiah 2.1-5 Psalm 80.1-3, 7, 14-15, 17-18. 1 Corinthians 1.1-9 Mark 13. 24-37

We gather this morning on the *first* day of a new liturgical year, Advent Sunday. It is also the Feast of Title for this parish. Yet today we gather for the *last* time as the people of Holy Advent, Armadale worshipping in this building. Today there is much to celebrate since 1898 when the Vestry of St George's Malvern established 'a mission and chapel of ease' in Kooyong Road. The Vicar, Canon Godby placed his Malvern curates here. This year we have returned to that practice so it seems to me that we have come 'full circle' in the relationship between Malvern and Armadale parishes.

I know that you have appreciated the ministry this year of The Revd Emmanuel Carrington who will remain at Malvern in 2012 to provide the stability of a familiar face in this time of transition. Let me record my appreciation of the way Emmanuel has grown into his role among you. He has given much thought to leading your worship and preaching and teaching here, and gained valuable experience. You in turn have been a community in which a young priest – ordained just 12 months ago – has been able to learn more his vocation and its joys and complexities as you have worked together. Thank you for your part in his ongoing formation in a ministry I believe will prove fruitful beyond our imagining.

This building, as many of you know, dates to 1910. No doubt there are some here today who never imagined they would see its closure. When we value things as they are, we assume that's how it will always be. Alas, this is not what happens. Change and even decay *is* all around. Nothing is forever. I have just returned from a study tour to Israel. It has been a wonderful encounter with the landscape of the scriptures and a new engagement with the stories of our faith. The city of Jerusalem, so central to the scriptures, so beloved by generations of Jews, is testimony to the reality that the only constant is God.

So also is the decision of the bishop and people of Christchurch in New Zealand that their beautiful cathedral cannot be rebuilt and so it has been deconsecrated. Like the Temple in Jerusalem, Christchurch Cathedral is now rubble. They are asking, as you are, 'What now?'

'What now?' As ever the only constant is change, and the only hope is the God whose uncontainable presence is paradoxically experienced as a rock that cannot be moved.

If, as I did only last week, you have stood on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem it becomes impossible to cling to the fantasy that we can hold on to God if only we can retain our buildings. Today, the Temple Mount is a platform where two mosques have replaced Herod's grand Jewish Temple, the one Jesus knew. The same Temple where Jesus was presented as a baby and made his bar mitzvah at twelve astonishing the teachers of the law with his understanding. The same Temple where he would one day turn out the money changers in a confrontation that would seal his fate with those who feared he was right – that the Temple which had taken over forty years to build was not indestructible.

Today, Jewish people, who once commanded the Temple's courtyards, now pray only at its Western Wall – only the wall that is of the platform, not even of the building itself. I went down into the excavations under the site and found three Jewish women praying at a place Jews believe is as close to the Holiest of Holies as it is possible to reach now. It is a sad fragment of the glory that once was.