

# Advent Reflection

## Week One: A Reflection from Fr Mark Harold

**The first candle on the Advent Wreath represents Hope;** it is sometimes called “the Prophet’s Candle”. The prophet we hear from repeatedly in Advent is Isaiah. We will hear the climax of his Advent voice at Midnight Mass: “The people that walked in the darkness have seen a great light”. The hope which Isaiah speaks of is not a vain spark of optimism but a profound truth of destiny: God will fulfil His covenant. Spiritual hope is much deeper than the secular understanding of hope. In the secular sense, hope is related to my desire or aspiration, whereas spiritual hope is my response to the covenant which God has promised.

The battle of light versus the darkness is a very real one in our human existence. It is right that we recognise the darkness of pain and suffering which can seem to pervade our lives; it has done just that in these days of pandemic in so many ways: death, illness, suffering, isolation, unemployment, debt, anxiety, depression. The first stage of hope is to recognise the darkness; to sympathise and to empathise with those it affects the most, and then to challenge it. Sister Helen Prejean is well known for her ministry to those who are sentenced to death by execution. She uses this quote to speak of her ministry: “I light a candle at midnight to say to the darkness, I beg to differ”. This Advent, can we join in with the cry of Isaiah, as Sr Helen does, and say to the darkness, “I beg to differ”? Recognise it for what it is and face it up from the deep wellspring within: the profound truth of hope.

History often shows us insights into how people have encountered the darkness with hope; one such episode was the “velvet revolution” in the former Czechoslovakia which spanned the season of Advent in 1989. Vaclav Havel, who emerged as the new President, lit the Prophet’s Candle once more: “Hope is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. It transcends the world that is immediately experienced and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizon ... hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism ... hope tells us that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out. Hope, above all gives the strength to live”. Where is the anchor of our hope? We find it when we respond to God’s covenant by engaging in a hope-filled encounter with Him; by lighting the Prophet’s Candle and living in the light which it shines in our darkness.



**Fr Mark Harold is parish priest at St Mary's, Brownedge.**