

LOOK! HE IS COMING...

"To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death".

We, human beings, live by hope. It is the driving force of life. A student hopes to complete the course and pass all exams. A patient hopes to regain health. A farmer hopes to get a good yield. A merchant hopes to get a handsome profit. A poor person hopes for prosperous days. An employee hopes for a promotion or a better salary. A writer hopes for fame. Parents hope for their children to be successful in life. A person who goes to bed at night hopes for the dawn.....

There is no end to hope... No hope, no life... Only human beings are hopeful and conscious of the future. No animal or bird can conceive of a distant future as we humans do. Human consciousness of future is constituted by hope of some sort. Now the whole world is hoping for the end of COVID-19 pandemic and the return to the "normal".

Advent is the season of intense hope. It is the hope for the One Who Comes. We pray every day *"Blessed is the one who has come and is to come"*. The seasonal fast announcing Christmas or the birth of Jesus is called Advent fast. And we hope joyfully and prepare spiritually for the arriving one.

(The English word **Advent** comes from Latin '*adventus*' meaning *arrival*. The verbal root is *ad+venire* = to come).

A New Homely Practice of Light and Hope for Christmas

Let me describe a little candle-light ritual that some of us have been practising for some years during the Advent lent. While writing this, I fondly remember my friend the late Fr. K.T. Philip (Mulanthuruthy) of blessed memory. Although I had started it, my own practice had been rather chequered because of my frequent travels. But when I shared it with Philip Achen, he took it up most seriously, and propagated it in his parishes, and meticulously practiced it at home.

The ritual is as follows:

Take a suitable metal tray. Keep ready 24 small candles.

On the evening of 1st December, after family prayer, light one candle, and keep it standing in the upper corner of the tray. Read the first chapter from St. Luke's Gospel. After reading, put off the candle.

On the second day, light the first and second candles, and read chapter 2 from St Luke. On the third day, light three candles and read the third chapter, and so on.

As we know, St Luke's gospel has 24 chapters. The Advent fast ends in 24 days. On the Christmas Eve, all 24 candles together radiate light, and we have completed reading the life-giving Gospel of Jesus from Annunciation to Ascension.

Adding a new candle everyday means that light is gradually increasing like the rising sun at dawn. Our hope for the One who comes also becomes more and more intense. We are being gradually enlightened by this hope, and we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World in the night of 24-25 December in the church.

Note:

*In the Orthodox tradition the liturgical day begins in the evening. One day is from 6 pm today to 6 pm next day. Monday, for example, begins on our usual Sunday evening at 6 pm. So you may also begin the practice on the evening of 30th November.

*Small children enjoy lighting up candles. So better use very small candles. If we use big candles there will be too many big flames and, of course, the risk of fire).



- *When earlier candles burn out during the long period we may replace it with new ones
- *In case you miss one or two days don't give up. Fill up the gaps and continue.
- *Light is always welcome in the most desperate of situations.

