

**A PASTORAL LETTER  
FROM THE BISHOP OF LANCASTER**

**For the First Sunday of Advent 2025**



**APPOINTED TO BE READ AT ALL PUBLIC MASSES IN ALL CHURCHES AND CHAPELS IN  
THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER ON THE WEEKEND OF 29<sup>th</sup>/30<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

My dear people,

as we begin the Holy Season of Advent my thoughts turn to Mary, our Blessed Lady, beginning the final month of her pregnancy. She is carrying Life. For eight months she has sensed this child growing within her, this child given to her, and taking from her. As unborn children we feed on our mother's blood, warmth, nourishment. It is as though the mother says to her child, *'Take and eat, this is my body for you. Take and drink, this is my blood for you, that you may have life from me.'* In her case of course this nourishment is of a created type. Many years ahead, she would receive food given her by her Son, food of a different type, giving her eternal Life.

Let us reflect on this young pregnant woman as she offers us a way into this new Advent. She is expecting, preparing and waiting. She invites us to take on these same tasks in our own times by spending time meditating on her as she approaches the end of her pregnancy. We are so easily tempted to rush on to the events of the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, counting down the days, but that is to miss so much, as if we are so taken by the gift that we completely overlook the care taken by the giver of the gift. The gift has been chosen for us, prepared for us, brought to us, shared with us. None of this should be taken for granted.

Before the shepherds are disturbed at night, before angel choirs fill the skies, before the Magi leave their homelands, and whilst Herod remains in the dark concerning world events, this young woman carries in her womb the Lord of Life, already started on His work of Salvation. Even before her delivery she has so much to share with us. For her the Word became flesh nine months before Christmas, on the Solemnity we barely notice these days, the Annunciation of the Lord. She knows Him best of all.

What a precarious approach the Giver of Life has taken. From her village life Mary would be well acquainted with the risks of pregnancy. She would know of women who died in childbirth, of babies lost. She would know of difficult deliveries and infection risks. Added to that she now has an unwelcome 80-mile journey to make from Nazareth to Bethlehem and it has come at exactly the wrong time. St Joseph may be a good carpenter, but he is no midwife. While in Nazareth she was amongst her own

people and could count on the care and support of devoted family and neighbours experienced in these matters, and she had the comfort of familiar surroundings. Now however she is to be at the mercy of strangers, in a place unknown to her, full of uncertainties. It seems circumstances conspired against her and this little blessed life she carried within her. Thank God, with St Joseph by her side, she was able to trust in God's protection for herself and for the child in spite of the odds.

We need to reflect on this because we live in a culture which is increasingly losing sight and understanding of the gift of life and losing sight of the Giver of Life. Sadly, for all the advances in society, in healthcare and useful technology, there is much in our contemporary culture that works against life, particularly vulnerable life. Unborn children are severely and increasingly at risk. Each year hundreds of thousands are killed. The elderly are facing increasing pressure to effectively end their own lives. In hospitals DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) is often put on the records of disabled and sick by medical professionals without any reference to family. It is becoming an 'undisclosed policy'. Government chooses to cut Development-aid in favour of Defence budgets. The lives of millions of the poorest are adversely affected. From my years in Zambia and my visits to Ethiopia, South Sudan and Kenya I have seen what a difference it makes to the people whose living conditions are little different from those that the Mother of our Redeemer would have experienced. It seems that those who are born disadvantaged are subject to ever-increasing disadvantage. I strongly recommend to you Pope Leo's recently published first Apostolic Exhortation, ***Dilexi te*** (On love for the poor).

There is another event and another date that remains hidden from us, brought to our minds every Advent; the Second Coming of Christ. He promised to come again, and He keeps His promises. It will happen at an hour we do not know, but we must expect and prepare and wait.

The Centenary year is over. The year of Jubilee will soon be completed. This has been a rich year of Grace and Blessings for us. Blessings are more than favours or tokens of approval from a kind Lord. They are given as 'cage-rattlers' to wake us from sleep and pull us back from our distractions. They are given as tonics to strengthen us for what still remains to be done if we are to complete our journey of faith. They are given to enable us to expect, prepare and wait. Like Mary, I am called to be a guardian of creation, a guardian of life by becoming a guardian of The Life. If I fail in this, whatever else I may achieve will count for nothing.

With my blessing on you and your families,



+Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick  
**Bishop of Lancaster**