

Advent: when we approach Christmas with both joy and trepidation – as we do with all days of birth and death. This is birth and death correlated so closely that it's hard to be sure which is really happening, to tell them apart. When we looked at this gospel passage a few days ago, Leonie remarked that she wasn't sure which of the two people she would rather be – the one taken or the one left behind. Is it the one who is taken who is saved or the one left behind – the survivor? And I'm reminded of the ambiguity of the resurrection – one has to die first. T.S. Eliot captures this well in his poem, *Journey of The Magi*. They *see three trees on the low sky* as they approach Jerusalem and it matches the famous description of God by Rudolf Otto as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*: God as both fearsome and fascinating; a God of both judgement and mercy; who both attracts and repels at the same time. Do we stand and face this God or run away and allow ourselves to be distracted by all the cares and commodities of the world? This was the choice facing St Augustine when he hears a child's voice singing 'Take and read, take and read'. And he takes a passage from Paul's letter to the Romans and reads:

Let us live decently as people do in the daytime: no drunken orgies, no promiscuity or licentiousness and no wrangling or jealousy. Let your armour be the Lord Jesus: forget about satisfying your bodies with all their cravings. (Rm.13: 13-14)

How ironic that Christmas is so often just about that. And St Augustine goes on to say,

'I had no wish to read further, and no need. For in that instant, with the very ending of the sentence, it was as though a light of utter confidence shone in all my heart, and all the darkness of uncertainty vanished away.' (*Confessions* Book 8: 12)

He puts on the armour of the Lord Jesus Christ. Which brings us to the final ambiguity in today's gospel passage: the comparison of Jesus to a thief in the night who may come at any time to break through the wall of our hearts and steal us away. This is a startling image but I wonder for us, who have already, supposedly, put on the armour of the Lord Jesus Christ, whether the image serves better in reverse and that our problem is not about letting the Lord in but letting the Lord out.

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