As we’ve now mercifully made it past Black Friday, am I alone in hoping that the adverts will die down a little bit? I know it’s a forlorn hope. It’s only going to get worse isn’t it. I also realise this makes me sound like a boring old man. Whatever happens these days, however much time I spend thinking about whether our household is prepared for Christmas (yes, it is coming sooner than you think), which mostly means making sure we have enough Pigs in Blankets so I have a steady supply over the holiday season, there’s a creeping sense of fear that we’re never ready, never prepared. Next week we enter the season of Advent, a time of preparation for Christmas. It might help you if you think about doing your Christmas shopping before December 23rd and so are a little more prepared and less stressed than you were this time last year, but actually this particular time of the year is primarily about making ourselves ready for the season that is to come, the one where we remember Jesus being born as a baby (that *is* actually what Christmas is about) and living out the truth of the phrase*”Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13)*. Beyond that, there is the exciting and mysterious offer for each of us to play a part in the story of making the world a better, more just and fair place, for everyone by living his way.

But I’m jumping ahead in Jesus’ story and you wouldn’t want me to spoil the ending, would you.  Why this has particularly come to mind for me as I write this column is not some evangelistic zeal, even though I am a beardy vicar. Yes, there have been some changes since that photo in the top corner of the page was taken. Rather, the way that the need for meticulous preparation and a willingness to ‘die for the cause’ is central to a successful football team too. As I’ve said before, I have a privileged position for which I’m very grateful, in that Jimmy, the staff and the players welcome me along to training when I can make it and I have been hugely impressed, both by the detail that goes into getting everything ready for matches and the togetherness that clearly exists within the squad. I refuse to use the phrase ‘group’, it always makes me think of Brendan Rogers. I really do believe that the players and staff we have at the club this season have a willingness to support one another, to work with and for one another, to suffer for one another in order to reach their ultimate goal of victory in as many games as possible and the quality to bring it about.

Time spent getting ready for Christmas (donations of Pigs in Blankets very welcome) is an important step in making sure we and whoever we are able to spend it with have a great time. Similarly the players will be well-prepared and undoubtedly ready when they step out on to the field this afternoon. I’ll even be ready with my winter socks, so that my feet don’t freeze to blocks of ice. Over the next month, what will you do to get ready for Christmas? It truly can be the most wonderful time of the year if we prepare correctly. Sorry if you’ve now got a crooner warbling away in your head.

Up the Cobblers!