

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

1 Advent
December 2, 2007
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Bringing the Light”

Today is the first Sunday of the churches calendar year. Today we begin year A in our three year cycle where we Christians follow the 3 year ministry of Jesus and participate in his life and teaching through the Gospel readings.

Advent is that season that brings the hope and expectation of the coming of Christ—the coming of a Messiah. The church over 2,000 years has designed these four weeks to be a time of prayer, and reflection in our lives when we contemplate the scriptures more closely. We search the words that the prophets wrote all those years ago that foretold the coming of Christ our Savior.

We mark this season, in the way we prepare the church. We drape the hangings in blue and place our Advent wreath for all to see. Its candles count off the weeks to Christmas and the birth of Christ. In Advent we expect the holy words of Isaiah to punctuate the readings’ we listen for the great Anglican hymns of Advent: “On Jordan’s banks” and “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” We hear the first chimes of Christmas carols; most written in the Middle Ages for Village Mystery Plays. Advent is that season of preparation and we are invited to prepare also.

This year we will gather at the 7:00pm service to witness the children Nativity pageant. We will call on the Wise men of the parish, to walk, sing and present their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh at the manger.

Children playing shepherds and those fine animals that warmed the stable at Bethlehem will fill our sanctuary. The angel Gabriel will appear to Mary who will travel with Joseph to his home town of Bethlehem. Here under the golden star above our Altar, the Christ child will appear. Zefferelli with his entire movie making skill could not fill our sanctuary with more meaning or purpose on this Holy Night. But this year will be different as the sweet tones of the Casio will be replaced by the heavenly choruses of the great pipe organ. This year we will have our own heavenly throngs of angels singing in the choir.

Will you contemplate with me today, how God has blessed us, as we enter the 2nd week of our pledge drive, and this new church year?

I feel that as a church and a community we have come together in this year of 2007. God has sent us new members Albinson’s and Gunn’s, Young’s and Selnick’s, who have come to join families who have maintained and supported the parish for many years: Beecher’s and

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

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Grosso's, Jones' and Holleran's, Brook's and Bertolini's, Tyler's and Radcliffs, Ruzanski's and Lockwood's, Coughlin's, Hall's, Luhr's and many, many more. If Advent is a time of preparation, it is also a time of Thankfulness for what God, **our** has brought into our lives in the person of his son Jesus Christ.

Today's Gospel, the first gospel of the New Year speaks of the 2nd coming and the Day of the Lord. It is a prophetic reading. Just as Noah's people were not prepared for the flood, so mankind will not be prepared for the end of the world. The world will not, Jesus reminds his disciples, the world will not go on forever. Like all things it will come to an end. The lesson is clear. We are here for a purpose. That purpose is about the saving plan of salvation that begins and ends with Jesus Christ. We will be judged for how we have lived our lives and the decisions we have made. Jesus and the Gospel say "Yes."
"Keep awake because you do not know the day the Lord is coming. You must be ready because the son of man is coming at an unexpected hour."

The early church was never afraid of these words. They embraced them and even looked forward to the coming of Christ at the end of time. They were certain of their salvation, not because they felt they were perfect, but because they knew themselves to belong to the Body of Christ and they believed it was the Body of Christ that would be saved.

Advent comes around each year to remind us that we are a part of Nativity, we are part of incarnation; we are part of the story of salvation. As beautiful as the story of Christmas is with its tales of angels, dreams, shepherds and Kings it is we, the followers of the Christ, who get to play the greatest role because we get to continue Christ's work in our world.

This year, during these four weeks of Advent I want you to do something audacious. I want you to become an agent of the Christ whose feast we prepare to celebrate. I want you to work at understanding Atheism and the Secular world that sees this as just another holiday. Greet people with "Happy Christmas" and don't accept "Happy Holidays." Place an angel in your window and an Advent wreath n your door.

Sent a Christian Christmas card that in some way tells the Jesus story. This Advent prepare for the arrival of the Christ child by making his story known. Volunteer this year to give a few hours to visit the old and the sick in nursing home and hospital.

Resolve to tell the story to your children and grandchildren so they know Christmas is about more than Santa Claus and Christmas gifts.

Paul in the beautiful chapter 13 of Romans reminds us that we are all children of the light; we do not belong to the dark. Advent repeats this message many times in the Old Testament readings culminating with the words of Isaiah on Christmas Eve:

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“The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light. To those who have walked in the Valley of the Shadow of death, a new light has dawn.”

We Christians hold that light to be our Christ the “Light of the World.” As we grow older we should be ever prouder to hold that light aloft. Do not say “I am 70 years” rather say for 70 years I have held the light of Christ.

The words of Isaiah.

Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways applies to each one of us who week by week seek our God in this Holy place.

Our prayer this Advent must be: Come Lord Jesus and find a place of welcome here in this House of God. Find there in our hearts a home and a place of praise and Thanksgiving to your Father. Tel us with your Spirit that as your Body we may be born anew and bring your light to our fractured world.

Amen+