

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

1 Advent  
December 3, 2006  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## Coming to Advent, Coming to the Kingdom

Welcome today to the first Sunday of the church's year. Our minds are drawn today to Advent and our four week preparation period of the coming of Christ at Christmas.

Advent prepares us for incarnation. God our God inaugurates his plan of salvation and takes on flesh to become like us. In a real sense, it is as if God has tired of his efforts in the Old Testament to turn mankind from sin and war. Now he is prepared to show us the way to be truly human by taking on our nature. Now he will live our life, feel our pain and die our death.

Between now and the great feast of Christmas every reading, lesson and psalm will speak of "coming," "preparedness," "readying" ourselves for his arrival. Prophets will foretell the Christmas story in rich language and flowing terms.

Messianic prophecy fills much of the Old Testament literature from the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom in the year 721BC. It will speak of the coming of a King and a Savior. Constantly, it will refer to the house and line of David. Sometimes it will make reference to the "Root of Jesse" David's father. When the Messiah comes he will herald a new era, a new kingdom that will bring peace, healing, wisdom and the reign of God.

Christians today still believe in a Kingdom theology. There are those who read the lessons of Advent and recognize this Messianic language, not as something from the past, but as something that belongs to the near future.

In a sense we live in a parallel world to the one that existed just before the birth of Jesus. In those days many Jews had drifted away from the worship of Yahweh their one true God. The Covenant Law and the Prophets, had diminished in importance. Wealth and the influence of Roman and Greek culture had taken their place.

By the time of Jesus only a tiny remnant had stayed faithful to the life of love and prayer that the Covenant at Sinai had called for. Among them could be found Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zachariah, Anna and Simeon. God chose the humble and the holy to bring his salvation to a world that believed in riches, wealth and power.

What, you may ask, has changed in two thousand years? Wealth and power still rule economies. Cruelty, pain, poverty still sweeps nations and continents.

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Is there still a remnant, a faithful few, who truly believe in the values of Jesus their King and are prepared to live a life of genuine goodness and dare I use the “H” word and say: “Holiness?”

Here in 2006 with Advent knocking on our door, what does it mean to be holy? To be holy means to open the door and allow God to be a part of your life. To be holy means to allow God to dwell where you keep your soul.

In the movie “Tombstone” Wyatt Earp asks Doc Holiday what is the matter with the outlaw Johnny Ringo? What makes him tick? Holiday replies: “Men like Ringo have a big hole where once they had a soul and nothing in the world will fill it.”

I wonder amid all the commercialization of the Christmas season if the same cannot be said of much of our 21 Century Western civilization; that we have a big hole where once our souls used to be and all the electronics, gadgets and technology in the world cannot fill it. We live in a world of excess that is fed by a constant need for bigger, better, quicker, faster, higher, but most of all more.

The National and Diocesan Conventions of the Episcopal Church asked us all this year to break the cycle and return to lives of prayer and holy habits. We have the opportunity to return to being “Kingdom Christians” again and returning to the values and life style of Jesus.

Besides being a time of preparation, Advent is also a time of penance. Perhaps we no longer fast in the way that Christians did years ago, but we can take up the “Spirit of Advent” and renew it in our lives.

The Spirit of Advent is the spirit of Christ’s Kingdom. It seeks to return us to the truth of our faith. It says, you have tried, chasing after earthly things and you know nothing made you happy, now seek after heavenly things instead. In Advent we seek a spirit of giving. In Advent we look to compassion, mercy and forgiveness. We are asked to return to the human concern and care of all in our sphere of influence. Advent brings home the Beatitudes of Jesus to us and asks us to be the makers of peace and the care givers of the poor.

The answer to the question: Are you a Kingdom Christian? Is yes I am, if what you mean by Kingdom is an alternative to the greed of the world. Yes I chose to live my life by the values of Jesus. Being a Kingdom Christian means letting God into your life whether you are rich or poor. It is about how you treat your fellow human being and the compassion of Christ that you show them.

On Saturday morning as the sun was coming up, we in this church lost a Kingdom Christian. In that moment all of us lost a friend. Janine and Maize lost much more in a

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husband and a son. Richard was behind everything we have tried to do in this church over the last four years. His ideas, his values, his encouragement and his wisdom have been a rock for everyone who have served on the Vestry or took part in any of our ministries. Flea market or concession stand he donned his jeans and worked shoulder to shoulder with the rest of us. He believed in the politics of gentle persuasion and not in conflict and confrontation.

Today's readings for the first Sunday in Advent could have been written with him in mind.

“To you, O Lord, I lift p my soul. My God I put my trust in you. Show me your ways, O Lord and teach me your paths.” Psalm 25

And from Paul to the Thessalonians:

“How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?” 3:19

Perhaps you and I will not see Richard's like again in our lifetime, but his legacy will endure in this church that he loved.

And on this our Rainbow Mass Sunday we continue to be drawn to a Gospel of that includes all who seek Christ in their life. That invitation this morning at our 10:00 service comes to Jennifer in the sacrament of Baptism..

It is unusual for us to have a Baptism in Advent, yet this year it seems so ideal to again commit ourselves to Christ and his values as we prepare for his great coming.

Baptism asks us: “Do we believe in anything anymore?” Our answer is unequivocal. We believe in Jesus Christ. We believe in the power of goodness and we believe in the value of the Kingdom. As we welcome Jennifer this morning as a true follower of Christ, let us remind ourselves of the kind of Christians we aspire to be.

Christ is coming this Christmas, whether this world wants him or not, and his values and his salvation is what we stand for today, tomorrow and until his heavenly Kingdom comes.

Amen+

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