

December Pastor's Page

Fall has slowly fallen by the wayside, and while here in Minnesota we can never tell when it's going to begin "look[ing] a lot like Christmas," we do know that the white stuff will be coming soon enough. The last of the Thanksgiving leftovers should be polished off this year by the time we begin the church season of Advent on December 3rd with the youth of our church presenting their Christmas program during our worship service. This year's program is The Christmas Guest – A musical adaptation of Markham's poem "How the Great Guest Came." We will also be celebrating Communion that morning, so don't miss out!

Please plan to join us for worship throughout December, not only at our candlelight Christmas Eve service, but in the weeks of Advent anticipation leading up to that holy celebration. In case you're wondering, YES—there will be a regularly-scheduled worship service on Sunday the 24th. There are four Sundays in Advent, so plan now to join us at both 10:30 and 5:30 on Christmas Eve.

Now contrary to what retailers have been spouting already for weeks, "Black Friday" is NOT the beginning of the Advent or Christmas season. In the Christian tradition, the anticipation of the Advent season comes to light in the voice of Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah tells us, "*The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made... I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*" (33:14-15) Between the anticipation of the Messiah's birth and his execution of justice and righteousness in the land, there lies a journey—one both familiar and unknown at the same time.

During the Advent season the church prepares for the coming of Christ, much like a couple preparing their own home for the arrival of a new baby. There seems so much to do: shopping, sending cards, cleaning, making guest lists, decorating, attending special concerts, baking, and even travel. Scurry, scurry, or you'll never be ready! But before we put the cart before the horse, perhaps we need to slow down and remember to keep Christ in Christmas.

Each of us has our own vivid memories of the excitement, anticipation, and wonder that is rolled into Advent and the celebration of Christmas. Some recall traditional family gatherings, a particular ethnic menu, a favorite gift, or even a funny mishap that made our celebration special. For some it is a season when the loss of a loved one seems particularly poignant. But I hope most of us also have memories that tie us to our church's observances, whether in this congregation or elsewhere.

One childhood Christmas memory I recall is alternating days with my sister to be the one to open the tiny doors of an Advent calendar. Admittedly, in my youth it may not have been the scripture passage contained inside as much as the fact that Christmas presents were one day closer, but the excitement of that small honor helped us focus on THE impending gift of a babe called Immanuel. If you share a similar memory, I have a gift for you!

Elsewhere in this month's newsletter we included a brief Advent calendar by which you can mark the passing of days leading up to the Christmas celebration. Each day contains a brief challenge activity to help you keep you focused on the holiness inherent in the season. If you would like to go a little deeper in your Advent preparations—with a scripture reading, short reflection, and prayer each day—I also have printed copies of an excellent devotional published each year by Luther Seminary in St. Paul. Stop by the office during the week or pick one up in the narthex on Sunday. I hope that one or both can be a meaningful guide through the busyness that threatens to overrun us at this time of year.

This is an exciting season for all of us, particularly as we hear God's word speak through the expectation of the scriptures. As the *Feasting on the Word* commentary series so aptly concludes:

"At Advent, God's people summon the courage and the spiritual strength to remember that the holy breaks into the daily. In tiny ways, we can open our broken hearts to the healing grace of God, who opens the way to peace...Advent is not a season for passive waiting and watching. It is a season of wailing and weeping, of opening up our lives and our souls with active anticipation and renewed hope."

Let us strive to let the holy break into our daily lives, during Advent and throughout the coming year. Blessings to you and yours!

Rev. Cory Germain