

## *The Reverend's Ruminations*

Here it comes, that season we all seem to anticipate—and with which many of us mark the passage of years. It's not just winter, or even hunting season, it's Christmas! The delicious meals (and leftovers) of Thanksgiving already seem a distant memory, and now the Christian season of Advent begins on Sunday, December 2. Maybe it was ingrained in us as children as we waited impatiently to open the gifts under the tree, but there is great anticipation among all ages once Christmas appears on the near horizon. Some view it with joy, some with sadness, some with a bit of trepidation, and many with a mix of emotions and memories. We all anticipate it in some way, but what are we "looking forward to" as Advent guides us ever closer to that blessed day?

In our Christian tradition, we tend to speak with some certainty about the birth of Christ, but according to many modern historians, the year is actually somewhat unsure. It is believed to have been between 7 and 2 BC, but even the exact month and day of his birth are unknown. In our Bible, his birth is mentioned in Matthew and Luke, but not the other two gospels. After much debate, by the early-to-mid 4th century the western Christian church had settled on December 25 as the official observation of Christ's birth, a date which was later adopted in most of the east as well.

In following the calculations and teachings of several well-known theologians of the early second century, the observation of Christmas may have initially been chosen to correspond with the day exactly nine months after early Christians believed Jesus to have been conceived. However, one of the things that has made December 25 a controversial date among Eastern Christians in particular is that its placement on the calendar by the early Roman Catholic Church coincided with one or more ancient pagan or polytheistic festivals that occurred near the date of the southern solstice (i.e., the Roman winter solstice).

Many in recent years have also lamented the intertwining of non-religious traditions with the commemoration of Christ's birth. Things like mistletoe, Santa Claus, and even Christmas trees and light displays have taken on a life and tradition all their own. To some, such trappings seem to threaten the deeper meaning Christians observe in Christmas. Certainly gift-giving, and the accompanying shopping blitz perpetuated by major retailers, has lost much of its original association with the celebration of the birth of our Savior!?!

But before we fall into a holiday funk analyzing the state of our world today, let us reclaim the joy of Advent as it points expectantly, even triumphantly, toward Christmas. Advent is a time of anticipation, a season in the Christian year in which we recall the prophecies, promises, and events leading up to the birth of a baby in a stable in the town of Bethlehem. The prophet Isaiah is one of the most-often cited heralds of what was to come. In Isaiah 7:14 he proclaimed, *"Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel (God with us)."*

This of course would be no ordinary birth, but then again it was no ordinary baby. As the angel joyfully proclaimed in Luke 2:10-11, soon after the blessed event, *"I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."*

Between those familiar passages, there are just over three weeks of anticipation. And while some of us may think we've outgrown the excitement of staring wistfully for hours at the brightly-wrapped gifts under the tree, there is something even more exciting in our future than ripping cheap wrapping paper. It is the joy, peace, and promise that we recall as we celebrate the greatest gift ever given: God's one and only son Jesus Christ, who from humble beginnings in a manger would rise to be King of all.

Blessings to you throughout the busyness of your Advent season, and may we all find time to pause and worship God together!

Yours in Christ's service,

*Rev. Cory Germain*