

The Reverend's Ruminations - December 2020

As we enter the season of Advent with its anticipation of the Christmas event, old familiar feelings come over us. No matter what our age, this time of year brings twinges of anticipation. As children it was for the first snowfall, sledding, ice skating, hot chocolate, mom's holiday baking, and of course the Christmas presents that begin to appear under the tree. Come to think of it, some of the anticipation is the same as we grow older, only some of it starts to feel more like dread. When will I have to shovel that first snowfall or fire up the snowblower? Will I do some unexpected "ice skating" as I make my way to the grocery or the post office? How will I ever get all those cookies baked? And how will we afford to put any gifts under the tree this year in the midst of a pandemic? Will we even be able to have a family gathering if COVID-19 cases continue to stay at (or even set new) record numbers in the area?

It can start to feel overwhelming if we let ourselves lose too much of our childlike joy for the season, but that doesn't need to happen. Prioritize the most important of your chores, but don't forget to take time to watch those first flakes float down outside your window and just recall what a simple joy that felt like as a child. Take time to pray, thanking God that you are warm inside your home and asking that others less fortunate will find shelter against the cold. Open your Bible and read about the anticipation of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary in the first chapter of Luke as it points to the familiar story of Christ's birth that we'll share during the Christmas Eve service.

Ten years ago this month, anticipation of a different kind was building to a fevered pitch. The 419th Movement Control Battalion (US Army Reserve) and I had finished ten months of work in Afghanistan, trained our replacements to carry on the mission there, and couldn't wait to get on a plane headed back to the United States. Ellen and the kids, like all the families, were counting the hours until our arrival. The anticipation for all of us was not unlike the excitement of a five-year-old lying under the family Christmas tree on December 23rd—the presents are in place, but can't yet be opened. When the day finally arrived and I surprised each of the kids in their classrooms, it felt like Christmas had come early as I held each of them in my arms. Having experienced *that* joy, I can only imagine the feelings that must have washed over Mary as she held the long-anticipated messiah in her arms that first Christmas day.

To help focus your Advent season this year, I will be distributing a weekly email *Advent and Christmas Family Toolkit* which is being produced by the UCC Minnesota Conference. Look for it to be included with my weekly bulletin email that prepares you to attend church services either in person or virtually through our Facebook, RightNow Media, or church web pages (or Thursday afternoons on Fairmont cable channel 12). 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.

My wish for you this Christmas season is that you never lose that Advent anticipation you knew as a child. Take time during this busy month to keep Christ in your Christmas!

Blessings to you and yours,

Rev. Cory Germain