

St. James' E-pistle

December 18, 2015

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

The anticipation has been building for weeks now, practically to fever pitch. People dressing up in funny costumes, the stores filled with toys, the long lines.... Of course, I'm talking about the release of Star Wars: The Force Awakens.

Sure, that may seem a little silly, but I think there's something instructive in how people approached the movie. If you spent any time on social media, you will have noticed the number of Star Wars fans who put up posts pleading, "Please, no spoilers!"

They wanted to be surprised. They wanted the moment to be big. They wanted, more than anything, to have the deliciously agonizing anticipation of what was to come. What they did not want was to have bits and pieces of it leaked out until they knew how everything would go.

This is funny since we all know roughly how the movie will run anyway - it's the same way every action movie runs. The good guys win. But we still want that sense of anticipation.

The same is true of Advent. Even though we know how it's going to go. We know that Christ will come in a manger. We know that there's no room at the inn. We know about the shepherds and the angels and the magi and Herod. But we also know about waiting for the right moment. We know about anticipation.

That's why we don't sing Christmas carols before their time.

That's why we don't say Merry Christmas yet.

That's why we don't decorate too early.

That's why we don't have a pageant before Christmas. The babe's not born yet - save the celebrating.

Anticipation is good. It's part of the process, helping us prepare not only for the infant but for Christ in our hearts and for life eternal. Not only does it prepare us, but it gives us a level of excitement for what's to come.

When I was a kid, the anticipation was for Santa coming. Now that I'm an adult, I still have that sense of looking forward to something great. It's bigger than Santa. Bigger even than the Force. It's Christ then, now, and forever.

I can hardly wait! But like the fans standing in line at the theater, I will. And it will be good.

Grace and Peace,

Chuck+

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The News of the Church

Christmas Service Schedule: See attached flier.

Sunday School News: We don't have the totals in yet from this past Sunday's donation sale, but wanted to give a big THANKS to all who made donations towards the purchase of a grave marker for Jackie Jennings. Once we have all the final details, we will share with everyone...

Sunday School Live Nativity: Please join us this **Sunday, December 20th**, around 11:15 a.m. (during coffee hour), when the Sunday School children will have a 3 to 5 minute presentation called "'Twas the night before Jesus - a live nativity scene" in the parish hall.

Men's Breakfast: THIS Saturday! The Men of the Parish will meet Cranberry's on **Saturday, December 19th** at 8:00 am for breakfast and discussion. Remember that the January breakfast is on January 23rd and will be at the parish hall kitchen for a clean-up day.

Fr. Allan Ford's 50th: St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Staatsburg would like to invite you to a celebration of Fr. Ford's 50th Anniversary of Ordination to the Priesthood. The special Eucharist will be on **Sunday, December 20th** at 4:00 PM.

Pageant Cast Meeting: The pageant cast will get together for a few minutes this Sunday immediately after the Sunday School Presentation.

A Word On Stewardship

We realize Christmas is coming, and there's so much to stress you out. Company coming, gifts to buy and wrap, cards to send... And then the bills to pay.

But if you could take a moment to do two things, it would make life and ministry in your church just a little easier. First, if you could check to make sure you've handed in your pledge card, that would help our budgeting process. Second, if you could check to see that you are up to date on your current pledge, that would help us keep this ministry running.

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Finally, if you are ever in financial distress, please let Fr. Chuck know. It's entirely confidential, and wherever we - as your family in Christ - can help, we want to.

The News of the Diocese

Diocesan Cycle of Prayer: Please pray for these diocesan ministries this week. If you want to check out the entire year's calendar for intercession, it's simple to find - go to <http://www.diocesenyn.org> and click under "Beliefs and Practices."

20 St. Luke's School, Manhattan

21 On the feast day for Saint Thomas the Apostle we pray for persistence in times of doubt.

22 The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine

23 The Leadership Development Commission

24 The Seamen's Church Institute

25 On The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ we give thanks for the Word made Flesh.

26 On the feast day for Saint Stephen we pray for all who work on behalf of the poor and the outcast.

Praying For Peace Everywhere:

Let us continue to light a candle for peace in the Holy Land - and everywhere. Prayer is our most potent antidote to hatred.

1. Candle for Peace

Please also light a candle on Fridays - holy to both faiths - for Peace

Let us Light Candles for Peace

Two mothers, one plea:

Now, more than ever, during these days of so much crying,
on the day that is sacred to both our religions, Friday, Sabbath Eve

Let us light a candle in every home - for peace:

A candle to illuminate our future, face to face,

A candle across borders, beyond fear.

From our family homes and houses of worship

Let us light each other up,

Let these candles be a lighthouse to our spirit

Until we all arrive at the sanctuary of peace.

2. The Mothers Prayer:

God of Life:

You who heals the broken hearted, binding up our wounds.

Please hear this prayer of mothers.

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You did not create us to kill each other
Nor to live in fear or rage or hatred in your world. You created us so that we allow each other
to sustain Your Name in this world:
Your name is Life, your name is Peace.
For these I weep, my eye sheds water:
For our children crying in the night,
For parents holding infants, despair and darkness in their hearts.
For a gate that is closing – who will rise to open it before the day is gone?
With my tears and with my constant prayers, With the tears of all women deeply pained at
these harsh times
I raise my hands to you in supplication: Please God have mercy on us.
Hear our voice that we not despair That we will witness life with each other, That we have
mercy one for another, That we share sorrow one with the other, That we hope, together, one
for another.
Inscribe our lives in the book of Life
For Your sake, our God of Life Let us choose Life.
For You are Peace, Your world is Peace and all that is Yours is Peace,
May this be your will
And let us say Amen.

Sheikha Ibtisam Mahameed and Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum
English Translation Amichai Lau-Lavie

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Susie Buhalis, Mariel Carter, Joann Clark, Michael Day, Dottie Drake, Ross Eames, Jr., Linkin Ewalt, Steven Foote, Heather Francese, Jack Gordy, Robert Guariglia, Harold Hall, Dalton K., Edie Kline, Barbara Knakal, Ashley Konyn, Rosemary Leuken, Joanne Lynn, Doris Mack, Gordon Mackenzie, Virginia Mackenzie, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Charles Pardee (husband of Sally), Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Grace Plass, Linda Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, John Ross, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Marguerite Spratt, Janice Syedullah, Tracy, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way, Cliff Wells and Shawn Wheeler.

Schedules

A Note about Schedules: The names you see below are those listed on their respective schedules. There are often times when, due to sickness or travel, substitutes are asked to fill

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in or trade positions. This will probably NOT be reflected in the lists below—so, if there is an inconsistency between what you see here and what you see on Sunday, that is alright.

Birthdays (this past week):	Aldona Raugalis, Christopher McGlynn, Joanne Lown and Randy Soden
Birthdays (next week):	Stephen Foote and Madeline Glancey
Acolytes:	December 20: Bryanna Burkhardt, Amelia McNamara and Braeden Hall December 27: Jasmine Thatcher, Jaylen Thatcher and Bill Fenwick
Altar Guild:	December 20: See attached schedule December 27: See attached schedule
8 a.m. Readers:	December 20: Angela Henry and Lucille Ogden December 27: Deb Belding and Paul Littlefield
10 a.m. Readers:	December 20: Russell Urban-Mead and Justin Bohlmann December 27: Patty Caswell and Nancy Montero
Ushers:	December 20: Saira Shahani and Pat Keefe December 27: Nancy Montero and Anna Marie Pitcher
Pledge Clerks:	December 20: Tanya Hall and Anna Marie Pitcher December 27: Doug Belding and Dean Caswell
Parish Cycle of Prayer:	December 20: Michael, Patty, Madeline and Emily Glancey, John and Gloria Golden and Kathy Graff December 27: Liz Granados, Chuck Kramer and Nick and Chris Granados- Kramer and Tom Greene
Coffee Hour Hosts:	December 20: Saira Shahani December 27: There will be no coffee hour this week.

This Week's Lectionary

Micah 5:2-5a

Canticle 15

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-55

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NOTE: Audio recordings of some sermons are now available on St. James' website, www.stjameshydepark.org Look under "Worship"

Sermon Preached on
Third Sunday of Advent
(December 13, 2015)

"Joy" at 8:00 a.m.

Sermon preached by the Reverend Emmanuel Mercer
at 10:00 a.m. is printed below

Fr. Mercer graciously allowed us to share his sermon in the E-pistle. There is no audio recording of Fr. Mercer's sermon (I tried, but it didn't turn out well), but there is an audio recording of my sermon at the 8:00 AM service. This way, if you missed one, you can read/hear the other).

Luke doesn't begin today's gospel story with nice, cuddling or affectionate words. He launches into the people with a kind of verbiage which is meant to prick their minds and to offer them the chance to re-examine themselves.

Remember, Socrates once said "an unexamined life is not worth living", and so as jarring as John's opening remarks may have been, the response of John's hearers reflects a desire to turn over a new leaf.

John's hearers lived in a culture that was self-absorbed with itself because of the unique claims about its lineage and heritage.

Oftentimes there is a sense of stupor that consumes people in such a way that they become unaware of themselves and their own deeds.

In his condemnation of the people, John evokes a significant figure in Jewish cultural and religious heritage-Abraham.

As you may remember, God called Abraham and established a covenantal relationship with him that He will be their God, and Abraham and his descendants, who will be as many as the stars of the sky and the sand at the shore, will be His people.

And so for generations, the descendants of Abraham looked on the covenant as the centerpiece of their identity. Jewish religious life and practice evolved around the covenant.

Quite apart from the ritual participation inherent in keeping the covenant, one only had to be born by a Jewish mother to lay a claim to being a part of the covenant, and enjoy the benefits that came with it.

By virtue of their birth, faith or the heritage of faith was passed on from one generation to another.

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But the gift that came freely by birth also created a community of people who became insulated to the extent that all they cared about was their ritual responsibility in making good on the covenant and not their responsibility to even those who were part of the covenant.

The covenant itself was hopeful and the promise was secured. But instead of the liberty that the promise of the covenant offered, John speaks to a people who were either trapped in a complete misunderstanding of what the covenant meant or a people who were unaware of the depth of their sin-sins which were cloaked in indifference.

I once heard a story of three teenagers in Wilmington, NC. They heard that a Civil Rights march was to be held on Main Street. They decided to go to the march, not to participate in the march but to see what this was all about.

When they arrived at the march, they saw both African Americans and Whites holding placards and marching.

For whatever reason, they could not fathom why there was a march, what are these people marching for? They asked themselves.

What was wrong with the society that these people were marching to correct? In their little minds, all was perfect, all was alright-and so why are these people disturbing the peace?

But when you live in a cocoon, you either fail to recognize or you fail to appreciate the limits to which you have subjected yourself.

Many years thereafter, one of the three reflected on this experience and remarked that we are sometimes so blinded by our sins that we become unaware of the depth of those sins and the extent to which we have been crippled by those sins.

If I am unaware of my sins, I cannot seek redemption. If I am unaware of my failings, I cannot seek renewal, if I am unaware of my shortcomings, I cannot seek fulfillment. Being aware of my sins means that I can seek the salvation which does not destroy me but transforms the old me into a new me.

What Luke seeks to have John do in today's gospel story is to raise the level of awareness of his hearers. Not that the message was any different from the prophetic messages of old, no it was not.

What was different this time was, John makes the claim that in fact their ties to the covenant, which had always provided a cover, as important as those ties may be, they will not in and of themselves be sufficient enough to satisfy the new reality which God is about to inaugurate.

To further illustrate the discontent, John argues, that not only can God raise stones to offer praise which will be unlike their empty praise, but God had basically moved on, and He has inaugurated a new dispensation which will be spearheaded by the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

In their dismay and fretfulness, they asked "What then shall we do?" John in his answer doesn't prescribe heroic acts or ritual performance or any act that might prove to be impossible or tasking to render.

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He simply asked them to be aware, share-however little you may have, be fair and just in your dealings with others and to only take that which is your due.

In other words, although they were still tied to the old, the demand is to participate in a new reality that commands nothing more than being aware of the needs of others.

When I was growing up in my little city in Ghana, I lived about half a block from a former slave fort-Fort Orange. I could see the fort from my house.

But all I knew about that fort was that it was a lighthouse, a lighthouse which offered navigational aid to ships. Over the years I thought hard and deep about this slave fort turned into a lighthouse, and I said to myself, that light often springs up from the darkest places of human life.

The symbolism of the slave fort having been turned into a light house reminds me that darkness cannot take hold over us forever, that indeed it is God who saves us; the God who saves us is the God who brings light into the darkness of our lives and the darkness of the world.

And so Paul can encourage the people of Phillipi to rejoice. Rejoice because light has come into the world.

Rejoice because the separation caused by sin and darkness has been overcome by human reunion with God made possible through Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Rejoice because God has restored our fortunes by taking His judgments away from us.

Rejoice because we ourselves have experienced a kind of resurrection which produces a new being-a being who has the power to create life out of death.

In my mind, resurrection is not a future event yet to be experienced, but a present reality which simply means that the resurrected is now aware, aware not only of himself but of others.

Advent is frightful but also pregnant with hope.

Frightful in the sense that we come face-to-face with our brokenness, and hopeful because we eagerly await a savior who makes us whole with the gift of self-awareness.

Thank God we do not have to engage in any heroic acts to show our new sense of awareness.

And so as you wait to celebrate the coming savior, I need you to make my day.

Make my day by sharing the life you have freely received. If you have two coats, make my day by giving one away.

Make my day with a renewed passion to seek justice wherever it may be found.

Make my day by lifting up the lowly and downtrodden.

Make my day by opening up your arms wide enough to welcome the total stranger.

Make my day with your new sense of awareness. Amen.

Christ is Born! Come Celebrate!



Christmas Eve

6:00 PM

Family Service

10:00 PM

Candlelight Service

Christmas Day

10:00 AM

Quiet Eucharist
(at chapel,
10 E. Market St.)

St James' Episcopal Church

4526 Albany Post Road
Hyde Park, NY 12538
For Info, call: 229-2820

