

St. James' E-pistle

December 20, 2013

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

A blessed 4th Week of Advent to you all! As we approach the 4th Sunday of Advent, we do so knowing that it's just a couple of more days till Christmas. We're running around trying to get the last decorations up, organize dinners, wrap (or purchase) presents.

It may not be exactly what the Church had in mind originally, but there is anticipation in the air this week. I anticipate a good Christmas myself - one filled with occasions joy, hope and peace. Not that I'm getting all sappy - nobody believes that when we sing "Peace on Earth..." that therefore everything changes over night. We live in a tumultuous world, whether it be the world as a whole or just our own tiny piece of it.

The reason I anticipate joy, hope and peace is that I plan to work very hard to see it. And to make it where possible. I plan to look at each one of you to see the light of Christ and feel joy. I look at this congregation and see hope for where we can go together in the coming year. I take note of the various little feuds in my life and know that I want to seek peace in them.

Mostly, I look at Christ and see the joy God has in us, the hope he has for us and the peace that comes to us when we allow him into our hearts. I'm not a terribly sentimental person, but I look at the Christ child and think, to become one of us, wow, that's hard.

To become one of us with all the attendant limitations and frustrations is by itself a sacrifice. Immanuel, however, means God with us. And Christ - God with us - took his sacrifice even further - dying for us so that we could be reconciled, so that our relationship with him could be healed.

I look forward not only to lighting that fourth candle on the Advent Wreath but to worshipping with you on Christmas Eve (and/or Christmas Day!) - to welcoming into the world and into our hearts the Christ Child who comes precisely because of God's joy, hope and peace in and for us.

And most especially because of God's limitless love for us.

I write in joyful anticipation of seeing you for Christmas services and look forward to wishing you a Merry Christmas.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Church

Christmas Worship

Share your Christmas Joy with others. Invite them to join you in worship.

Christmas Eve:

6:00 PM Family Christmas Service - placing Christ Child in the Creche, children's sermon, and St. James' Orchestra.

10:00 PM Candlelight Christmas Service - Pre-service music starts at 10:00. Liturgy starts at 10:30 with candlelight and choir. A beautiful celebration of the birth of Christ.

Christmas Day:

10:00 AM Simple Christmas Service - If you don't like to go out at night or don't like crowds, this is for you. At the Chapel, it offers gentle, quiet celebration.

Outreach: Please make sure that all of the presents for our annual "Star" program be dropped in the Wilks Room no later than this Saturday afternoon. Presents to be unwrapped and have the star either on the present or in a shopping bag. We are going to start to sort through all of the presents received on Thursday night. Most of the families will be picking up their presents on Sunday afternoon between 12-2, BUT we are asking if anyone could help us deliver out presents to 4 families. Also, helpers are needed when the families pick up their gifts. Call Deb Belding at (845)240-3194 if you could help, or email her at deborah.belding@yahoo.com

Thank you for once again making this a successful year for Outreach!

Epiphany Pageant: Please see the announcement included with this E-pistle.

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Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Janet Arms, Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kurt Burkhardt, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Kasey Gaulin, Jack Gordy, Andy Hall, Harold Hall, Jolanda Heijenbrok, Brooke Helton, Rev. Don Hoger, Barbara Knakal, Rosemary Leuken, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Deborah Porach, Don Renten, John Robinson, Marty Schroeder, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Debbie Stone, Gloria Veach, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way and Cliff Wells.

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 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:	Randy Soden and Chris McGlynn
Acolytes:	December 22: Team I 12/29/2013: Team II
Altar Guild:	December 22: Shirley and Pat (8 a.m.); Lynne (10 a.m.) 12/29/2013: TBD
8 a.m. Readers:	December 22: Debbie Belding and Lucille Ogden 12/29/2013: Angela Henry and Sue DeLorenzo
10 a.m. Readers:	December 22: Regina Ardini/Sophie Ciferri 12/29/2013: Patty Caswell/Bobbie Wells
Ushers:	December 22: Andrew and Tanya Hall 12/29/2013: Bobbie and Cliff Wells
Pledge Clerks:	December 22: Paul Littlefield and Dean Caswell 12/29/2013: Paul Littlefield
Coffee Hour Hosts:	December 22: Audrey Horne 12/29/2013: The Choir

This Week's Lectionary

Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalms 80:1-7, 16-18

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-25

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Sermon Preached on
Third Sunday of Advent
(December 15)

"What Did You Expect?"

I congratulate you on making it here today in this weather. I suggested to a couple of folks that they stay home rather than put themselves at risk trying to get here - mostly those who wake up and say, "I'm not going to let a little snow keep me away from church. Heck, there can't be more than four or five feet of it out there. I'll just get my shovel."

It is tricky weather out there - but then what would you expect? It's December - in the Northeast.

Of course, I've learned a long time ago that what people expect and what is reasonable or even logical are often two completely different things.

Take Advent for instance. Though I speak about it every week ever week of the season, people are still surprised at the harshness of the lessons. I mean we had the who brood of vipers thing going on last week, remember? And this week, look at them: Isaiah tells the people: "Here is your God - He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense." He is going to bring death and destruction.

Or the beautiful magnificat which we read instead of a psalm. Take a closer look: "He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones..."

I'm sorry, but there's just nothing Christmas-y about that, and each week, this surprises someone. How is that, to quote one of the tunes played endlessly these days, "the happiest time of the year?"

If you came expecting happy and joyful, you may want to alter those expectations.

But don't feel bad - in scripture, too, people had to alter their expectations. It seems that just like these days, people have in their heads the way things should be - and it rarely fits with the way things are.

John the Baptist was a good example. It seems that people were genuinely shocked when he was arrested. After all, he was a prophet, a holy man. But Jesus says to the crowd in effect: "What did you expect? A company man? He poked his finger in the eye of those in power. He did not wear fine clothes to show he was part of the establishment. He did not simply cheer for

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the status quo. He pointed out wrong where he saw it. It was only a matter of time before he would poke the wrong eye."

There's more to this than just John's arrest, however. Remember that John's disciples had come - publicly - to Jesus and asked on John's behalf if he was indeed the one they had been waiting for. John was not so sure because things were not working out the way he had expected. Jesus was not doing what John had expected.

John had expected to Jesus to be like John - only more so. A warrior! Someone who would not only point out the wrongs but fix them! One like Isaiah predicted or like Elizabeth envisioned in the magnificat.

Instead, he preached about a different kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. Yes, he healed the sick and fed the hungry but mostly he taught about the kingdom - what kind of messiah is that? Where is the overthrow of the bad guys? Jesus talks about forgiveness and mercy and not judging. It's all so unexpected.

Even after the resurrection, people still had unrealistic expectations of Jesus. In James' letter, he has to urge people to be patient. They had expected Jesus to come back in glory right away - to come on a cloud of power and wipe out all the bad guys and bring all the good guys to heaven. And it wasn't happening the way they thought.

God wasn't doing what they expected. Who'd a thought?

Which leaves us with just one question. What did you expect?

Seriously. What did you expect not only when you came to church today - but when you came to Christ? What did you expect when you chose to follow him as your Lord?

Did you expect that life would become easier? That you would never get sick, or that loved ones would not die? Did you expect that money would never be an issue again as long as you remain faithful and pray hard enough? Did you expect, perhaps, that you would be able to look at the world with calm detachment and an inner peace that can never be shaken?

Did you walk in these doors expecting to be justified in how you live. To hear sermons about the sins of others but your own brilliance at being part of this chosen people? Did you expect to walk in these doors so you could feel good about your achievements?

Or did you come to be challenged in your soul - challenged to grow into the Kingdom of Heaven?

This is a place to come to ask yourself: what does Christ expect of me? This is a place to be challenged, to ask: Do I know Christ well enough to know what he expects of me? Do I really want to know?

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Choosing to follow Christ means necessarily getting to know him - in scripture and in prayer. This means work on your part. It also means looking long and hard - not at others but at your own heart. Which may be even harder work.

That's what the season of Advent is all about - a call to that hard self-reflective work.

So if you expected following Jesus to be easy and all "feel-good," you might be disappointed. If, on the other hand, you expected him to lead on the path to the Kingdom of Heaven, you are in the right place. It's just that, in order to keep your eye on him and him alone, you have to throw out all those other expectations.

It's not easy - but it is good. Amen.