

St. James' E-pistle

December 6, 2013

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

I know that we ask a lot of everyone during these days and weeks in preparation for Christmas. We ask more of the altar guild, the choir, the acolytes, the ushers, not to mention anyone involved in the Christmas orchestra and Epiphany Pageant.

I believe it is important to know why we do this.

It is NOT because it's the big show, and we'll have visitors we want to impress. Sure, it's natural to want to put our best foot forward, but that approach can lead to fatigue, resentment and over-calculation. "Is it worth all the effort?" we ask ourselves even when we get larger crowds than we expect. Are we just doing this for attention, for money, for "recruits"? Are we looking at our Christmas preparations as a PR campaign?

I am not.

The reason we put on our finest, the reason we bring out the bells and whistles, is not because of our need to make ourselves look attractive to people who don't know us yet.

We pull out all the stops because we are celebrating. We celebrate the immense love that God has for us, such incredible love that he becomes one of us in the form of Christ. Such love that he embodies life at its fullest - with us.

We go to all this extra effort because we are celebrating within our community, within our family of faith, just how wonderful our God is. We do this whether there are five of us or five hundred. It's not about us - it's about God's love for us.

Nevertheless, we invite the world in to our celebration. They can choose to come or not - that's not in our hands. What is in our hands is to clean the house, shine the silver, tune up the clarinet, and prepare for a joyous party.

Yes! Invite everyone you can! Not because they have something we need but because joy is multiplied when it's shared. And the joy of Christ is what we are preparing for.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Diocese

Election of a Bishop Suffragan on December 7th: Please pray for the candidates and the delegates who will elect a Bishop Suffragan. Delegates from St. James' are: Fr. Chuck, Deacon Gail, Andy Hall and Wilma Tully.

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.

Pledge / statements: Many parishioners have asked about pledge statements to let them know if they are up to date on their pledges. We are working on making them more available to everyone. In the meantime, if you would like to see your statement, please contact Junior Warden Andy Hall at: 229-2126.

Cookie Sale: December 14 is the day for the big Candy/Cookie sale in the Parish Hall. We are still looking for a lot more cookies! If you can bake 10 dozen cookies, that would help tremendously. Please contact Deb Belding as soon as possible. Parishioner Audrey Stenger will also be selling her beautiful holiday centerpieces and she has generously donated three of them to raffle off. All proceeds from this event help us provide the Christmas meals for our 25 families in the community.

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Christmas Gift Stars: We still have 39 stars that have not been taken on the back wall of the church! If you haven't taken one or more!), please do! Make sure that you have signed your name on the clipboards provided in the back, and return all presents unwrapped by Friday 12/20. If you want to help out, but don't want to shop, no problem! We have provided Christmas Outreach envelopes in the pews for the next two Sundays for that purpose.

Advent Quiet Day: Getting stressed about Christmas shopping? Trying to remember what Advent was all about in the first place? Step out of the madness for a moment and join Fr. Masud ibn Syedullah at the Chapel for "Joy Is At Hand," a quiet day of Advent preparation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Fr. Chuck. Call the parish office to register!

Pageant Rehearsal: There will be an organizational meeting this Sunday following the 10 AM service for all who are interested in participating in this year's Epiphany Pageant. The pageant will be at a different time this year - Saturday evening, January 4. We will nail down the time at the organizational meeting.

Another twist this year is that the actors get to pick between two scripts: "The Magi Mystery Tour" and "The Graveyard Pageant."

Christmas Eve Orchestra: The Christmas Eve orchestra (for the 6:00 PM Christmas Eve service) will begin rehearsing after church on December 15 and again on December 22. Please see Mary Grosskopf or Craig Slegel after church this Sunday if you are interested in playing! Rehearsals for the St. James' Orchestra will be immediately after the 10 o'clock services on December 15th and 22nd.

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Janet Arms, Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kurt Burkhardt, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Kasey Gaulin, Jack Gordy, 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.

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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:	Lori Fenwick, Bonnie Foote, Anne Meisner, Brandon O'Mara, Alex Kramer, Saira Shahani and Patricia Weber
Acolytes:	December 8: Team III December 15: Team IV
Altar Guild:	December 8: Team Number III December 15: Team Number I
8 a.m. Readers:	December 8: Debbie Belding and Paul Littlefield December 15: Angela Henry and Lynne Koch
10 a.m. Readers:	December 8: Russell Urban-Mead/Judy Douglass December 15: Wilma Tully/Justin Bohlmann
Ushers:	December 8: Saira Shahani and Pat Keeffe December 15: Kathie Champion and Mary Gabel
Pledge Clerks:	December 8: Deb and Doug Belding December 15: Tanya Hall and Anna Marie Pitcher
Coffee Hour Hosts:	December 8: Jodi Triola and The Eames December 15: Jodi Triola and The Eames

This Week's Lectionary

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

Sermon Preached on
First Sunday of Advent
(December 1)

"Know Nothing"

I thought I'd start out Advent with a little American History lesson. Back in the 1850s, there was a political movement that eventually became its own political party. It was a strongly anti-

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immigrant - and especially on anti-Roman Catholic - movement with its main goal of keeping the Irish and Italians out of the US.

For its first few years, the group was semi-secret. Whenever a member was asked about its activities, they were supposed to say, "I know nothing." The party eventually became known as the Know Nothing Party.

While we can discuss the party's political proclivities later on, what interested me was its catch phrase: "I know nothing."

As a child of the 60s and 70s, that phrase brings to mind the TV show, "Hogan's Heroes," a World War II comedy based on a bunch of allied prisoners of war who were really secret operatives working behind enemy lines. One character in the show, Sergeant Schultz, was a large, loveable guard who let them get away with all sorts of subversive acts. Every time the prisoners did something, he simply said, "I know nothing." Did he secretly support the allies? Or was he simply too big a coward to confront them?

The Schultz character was more than just a comic buffoon, however. It was also a commentary on Germans who - while living in relative proximity to concentration camps - swore they knew nothing about it.

And that's the who thing. A lot of the time, we choose to know nothing. Choose to not see what is before our eyes. We choose not to see injustice or poverty or racism because it's easier not to. By the way, I mention the racism part because one of my former youth group kids from Peekskill posted on her Facebook how upset she was when a customer told her yesterday: "You're not bad for a colored girl. Then when he handed her his cash, and when she started to count it, he said, "Don't worry. It's a white man's money. It's good." She said that she knows society has come a long way in reducing racism, but this was evidence that the struggle isn't over.

So, that's one kind of not knowing.

There is another kind. When I wake up each day, I do not know what the day will bring. Yet I get up anyway. When a person goes into surgery, they don't know if everything will come out all right. Yet they go in anyway. When a parent sends their child off to college, they don't know how their child will behave, whether they'll study hard or party hard. Yet, they send that child anyway. To accept that we don't know everything is another kind of not knowing.

The question is, which kind was Jesus talking about in today's Gospel? When he discusses the second coming - the end of the world basically - he uses Noah as an illustration. He says people knew nothing about the flood - they continued to work, they get married, they eat and drink right up till the rains came.

But did Jesus mean that they knew nothing about the flood coming? Or did he mean that they willingly overlooked the injustices committed every day - injustices which brought God to the point of destroying humanity in the first place?

We all know that Advent is a season of waiting. Not just for the birth of a child, for the second coming. The lessons make that clear.

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But it is also a season of not knowing. Or at least of acknowledging our not knowing. Here's what I mean:

Jesus says we do know when Christ will come again. We can't know it anymore than we can know what the next customer will say to us at the cash register.

At the same time, the apostle Paul says, "You know what time it is, how it is now the time for you to wake from sleep." Paul is saying that we cannot hide our heads in the sand. We can not be Sergeant Schultz who innocently proclaims, "I know nothing."

The season of Advent is a season not only of waiting but of watching - of being aware. It's no accident that Christmas and the Feast of St. Nicholas - which is in just five days - are close together. Nicholas lived in a hard world where bad things happened to people all the time. The gifts for which he is famous weren't toys - they were life-savers. Nicholas looked around him and saw need - desperate need - and acted, anonymously as the legend goes.

In that sense, he's the perfect symbol for Advent - one who keeps alert, who watches for signs that God is at work. He didn't worry about the end of the world - he worried about the world God put in front of him.

The season of Advent reminds us that we cannot know everything, least of all when the world as we know it will end. But it also challenges us to acknowledge that, while we are on this earth, there is plenty to do, plenty of God's children out there in need. Advent - just like today's lessons - is a challenge to accept what we do not know but also to let go of the excuse of "I know nothing." Because we do know. Not when Christ will come again, true, but that he will come. The question is, when he comes, what will we tell him that we knew? Amen.