

**Advent 1 11 30&12 1 19**

**Happy Thanksgiving! And Happy New Year! December 1 is the beginning of a new church year in the Episcopal Church and this Sunday is the beginning of Advent. The word “advent” means “the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event.” Which makes sense, because for Christians, Advent celebrates the arrival of Jesus Christ. That’s when everything starts. And we celebrate it every year. We start over every year.**

**The Episcopal Church started out as part of the Church of England. That connection became strained during the American Revolution, and we don’t always agree, but we still remain friendly - sort of within the Anglican Communion.**

**At any rate, all churches of the Anglican/Episcopal tradition follow the same calendar. We have the same church year. - which is very similar to the Roman church year. Our church year begins with Advent. And throughout our Church year we follow a schedule of Bible readings and usually it runs like this for services with a Eucharist: one Old Testament reading, one psalm, one New Testament reading that isn’t a gospel, and one gospel reading. Now the goal of having all these readings, for every service, and every day of the week too, is this — that we should all, at some point, succeed in reading the entire Bible - or come close. So here’s how they broke it down:**

**We have three different church years - Year A, Year B, and Year C. And there is a different schedule of readings for each of those years. We just finished Year C and now we are back to Year A. In Year A, most of our Gospel readings are from Matthew. In Year B, most are from Mark, and in Year C, most of our Gospel readings are from Luke. John gets plugged in throughout the year, especially Lent. Matthew and Luke are the only gospels that tell Birth of Jesus stories. Mark starts with Jesus encountering John the Baptist. John starts like Genesis, “In the beginning...”, but it’s much more wonderfully and simply mysterious. It deals with, “Where was Jesus at the beginning of all things?” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In three short phrases John covers the relationship of the Trinity to itself and what God was up to before creation and forever after, including now. When you stop and think about it, these are remarkable books!**

**Matthew, Mark and Luke follow the Jesus biography line. That’s why they’re called the synoptic gospels. They follow the synopsis, the summary, of Jesus’ life.**

**ANYWAY, we are now beginning again with year A, and our gospels will be mainly from Matthew. More about today’s gospel in a bit.**

**But first, a few words about Advent. Advent is a time of optimism. Our collect reminds us that Jesus “came to visit us in great humility,” as a child of born to a poor man and woman and placed in a cow’s feeding trough instead of a nice cradle. Jesus came to live among ordinary people, among us.**

**Look at how our children experience Advent. And through them, try to remember how you used to experience Advent. We wait. With excitement! Sure we wait for presents and candy, but we wait in joyous expectation. Our families are going to get together. School will be letting out. The weather is changing. Maybe we’ll have snow? And finally, we begin to realize, it’s not about WHAT we’re waiting for. It’s about HOW WE WAIT. Children find joy in this waiting and we can too.**

**Our reading from Isaiah tells us that all nations will look to the God of Jacob and God will teach them to beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; that nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. What a wonderful vision! What a wonderful prophecy! It hasn’t come to fruition yet, but let us pray that it does, more important, let us pray as though it *COULD* and *WILL*. Let us pray that we can *learn* not to practice war any more. Let us pray as though there is hope for us.**

**Our psalm begs us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Peace in Jerusalem is almost inconceivable! The psalmist tells us that Jerusalem is built as a city at unity with itself. Maybe that's the psalmist's vision, but that has not been the reality of Jerusalem for thousands of years and it certainly isn't now. Even today, the walled Old City is divided into 4 quarters - Armenian, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim. Jerusalem has been conquered and reconquered. It's a constant battleground. It has been a constant reminder of the destruction of war. And thinking of that reminder, consider what Jerusalem *could be*. Let us pray for that, not as a possibility, but as a certainty. What *will* Jerusalem be?**

**And it is from within that spirit of certainty that we hear Paul's letter to the Romans. It could be written today. "You know what time it is" — "it is *now* the moment for (us) to wake from sleep." "For salvation is nearer to us now..." Can we believe that? Can we believe that salvation is nearer to us now? Can we believe that salvation is always near? I believe we can believe that. !**

**Can we hear Paul's words and follow them? "Let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." *There's* armor for you! Armor of light! What could be more protective? The most useful armor of all. Armor that protects us with the light of truth. Paul reminds us that living in the daylight means living honorably, as if there are no shadows, as if there is no quarreling or jealousy.**

**Oh, that's much harder than it sounds. Quarreling and jealousy creep up on us and overtake us, so easily, all the time.**

**And finally we come to our Gospel. And it's not about Jesus being born as a human child. No! This gospel reading leaps forward to talk about Jesus coming to us, returning to us, the Second Coming. Before we even get to celebrate the First Coming, Matthew tells us what Jesus had to say to his disciples about his return!**

**Oh, it's gonna be a big surprise! No one knows when he's coming back, not angels, not even Jesus - only God. Jesus says we'll all be toodling along, business as usual, just like everyone was toodling along, business as usual in the days of Noah, and then whoop! We won't even get the warning of a few drops of rain! But two people might be working together and one will be taken and one will be left. Swoop! That's probably where the guys who wrote the "Left Behind" series got their idea.**

**I'm sure the disciples had no idea what Jesus was talking about. "Whaddya mean I won't know when you're coming! You're right here! Where are you going?"**

**But the most important message of our gospel is "Keep awake!" "Be aware!" "Know what is going on around you!"**

**Jesus has always been surprising. Jesus defies expectations. From his birth to his death to his resurrection, Jesus is wonderfully unpredictable. So if we can't second guess him, maybe we should**

**just do what he says! Maybe we should just trust that Jesus loves us and do what he says!**

**It's Advent. Jesus will be born again this year just like last year, and guess what? It will still be a surprise! So let's do as God teaches. Wait like in wonder, like children.**