

Second Sunday of Advent, December 10, 2006, Liturgical Year "C"

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins - Curate

Scripture: Luke 3:1-6

***Preparing the Way***

Three men were walking in the desert. One was carrying a loaf of bread, another a bottle of wine, and the third a car door. They explained to each other: "If I get hungry I can eat the bread!" "If I get thirsty I can drink the wine!" "If I get hot --- I can roll down the window!" I guess it is all about being prepared.

Before Jesus took on human flesh, He sent John the Baptist to prepare the way. Scripture tells us that as a child in his mother Elizabeth's womb – John leapt when Mary and the pre-natal Jesus approached. His excitement was evident even then for his savior that was coming to free humanity from sin. (There is a very poignant scene in the just released film "The Nativity Story" that illustrates this quite effectively. I highly recommend the movie – and then go and re-read the accounts from Matthew and Luke)

Tradition tells us that John grew up in daily view of Mt. Nebo, on which Moses looked upon the Promised Land and spoke of the Promised Messiah. He lived near the Jordan where Joshua had crossed at Adam, when the river separated in two, like the Red Sea, so that the Ark of the Covenant could pass through. Near Jericho whose walls had fallen at Joshua's blast. This was the same region where the Prophet Amos pastured his flocks and dreamed of a Davidic King who would come and rule all nations. John was an interesting fellow – to say the least. He lived on locusts and wild honey. We might find it hard to believe, but locusts had been used as food from earliest times. They were roasted, or sun-dried, and eaten. It is said that they taste like shrimp. (According to Timon and Pumba in the Lion King – it's grubs that taste like chicken!)

John was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. Israel - living in Roman bondage was electrified by the voice of this strange, somewhat rugged, fearless hermit of the desert, crying out on the banks of the Jordan that the long prophesied Deliverer was at hand. The message of his cry was to "Repent." His preaching attracted large crowds; he was apparently very popular. People were paying attention. Many people came to be baptized by him. John's leadership had great influence and people seemed ready to do anything that he would ask.

John was at the pinnacle of his popularity when he baptized Jesus and proclaimed him to be the Messiah. Remember it was John who boldly stated "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Then, with his mission accomplished, he told his followers about Jesus. The Apostle Andrew was a disciple of John – who after meeting Jesus had to tell Peter. John had roused the nation, and presented the Son of God. His work was done.

This season of Advent heralds the coming of "GOD with us" - Emmanuel. It is the time when GOD comes to earth to take on human form and live as we live. It is the time when GOD shares his love with us as we should share our love with Him and among ourselves. Advent prepares us to welcome the arrival of GOD - The Teacher - who by example showed us how He would like us to live. How we should share His love between our Lord God and ourselves and, more importantly between you and me; between our neighbors and ourselves.

Last Sunday- the first Sunday of Advent, we lit the first Advent candle - the candle that represents preparation. It symbolizes our preparation for God's coming again. "The great day of the LORD is near: near and coming quickly" according to the Prophet Zephaniah.

The season of Advent gives us four weeks to think about where we are in God's creation of things.

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Advent needs to be the time when we, as individuals, as members of the Body of Christ, turn a mirror on ourselves. And we should look at that reflection of ourselves and consider our place within this large and wonderful family. We need to take a good look!

Isaiah expresses Advent’s hope: the hope that GOD would come and find us mindful of Him, in preparation for Him.

Let’s face it, because of the demands our life, it is very easy to forget what our life should be all about - that we are, because of GOD; that we have, because of GOD. As adopted children of God - we are the heirs of a truly wonderful God. Without our belief and faith in GOD, this would certainly be a different world in which to live. Without faith – this would not be a “Wonderful Life.” Knowing God, in Christ Jesus, is the best thing to ever happen to us.

- Advent is four weeks when we should reflect on how we might need to heed John’s call to the people – to repent of our sins.
- Advent is four weeks when we should balance our busy schedules with quiet times for reflection and to listen to the still small voice of God.
- Because listening allows God to put things that matter on our hearts; reflection gives us the room to ask ourselves questions that we may not otherwise hear from others.

Questions like: What do I believe? Why do I believe it? What difference is it making in how I live? What do I give to GOD? What of mine belongs to GOD?

Advent should cause us to do two things: watch and wait. Staying awake and being alert are two Advent behaviors or preparation that Jesus calls us to.

Jesus is not coming to Bethlehem this Christmas. Bethlehem is history. Bethlehem has moved. Bethlehem is now located right here in Tonawanda; wherever WE are: wherever we love, trust, laugh, cry, and take a stand; wherever we tell the truth, forgive, or just wait on GOD to teach us what to do. Our hearts are the new Bethlehem! That is God’s gift to us or, rather God’s challenge to us. And how can we thank God?

GOD has given us the abilities and the means to do his will. What we do when GOD calls upon us, is our obedient “thank you” to GOD. But first, we have to be aware of when God is calling us. We need to make times of stillness and reflection, to hear Him! We need times of stillness and reflection, time spent deep in His Word, to decide how we will prepare ourselves for His coming again.

As stewards of our lives God gives us the opportunity to do something for Him in our lives. We are here as short term tenants, and we have the freedom to decide on what we will do and how we shall spend our time. We can decide to respond to God’s call, or not. So let me ask you a question – from the words found in Luke 18:8 “*when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*”

My brothers and sisters in Christ – I believe the answer is through prayer and preparation – as St. Paul says “*that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*” (**Philippians 1:9-11**)

**“Prepare ye the way of the Lord”**