

# Sermon: Advent 7

The Rev. Mike Wernick

December 24, 2017

Year A  
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16  
Canticle 15  
Romans 16:25-27  
Luke 1:26-38

Unless you're visiting this morning... you know... that here at Two Churches... we celebrate a seven-week Advent... and our seven weeks of waiting are almost over... *Advent* means Arrival... and we wait for the arrival of two things... we celebrate a seven-week Advent to help us avoid the rush to Christmas morning... because... contrary to what popular culture believes... the overarching focus of Advent... is not the birth of the baby Jesus... though this is the first thing for which we wait... but the primary focus is the full manifestation of the Reign of God... and this is the second thing for which we wait... this is the focus of the Revised Common Lectionary... of our assigned scripture readings from the Sunday after All Saints' Day... until the last Sunday of Advent... today... only in this last week... do these readings... which reflect the themes of the Church's weekly worship... begin to shift from a focus on eschatology... *the final destiny of the soul... and of humankind...* to a focus on God's incarnation...

A seminary professor of mine... The Rev. William Petersen wrote... the intent of the season... is to look to the end... to the fulfillment of the implications of the Paschal Mystery... set forth... *for us and for our salvation...* in the resurrection of Jesus Christ... in other words... by looking to the end... we look to the eternal moment that makes sense out of all our moments... Advent... therefore... is a season... not so much a preparation for the Incarnation... but a season that sets the context... for the entire liturgical year... and keeps it... when properly observed... from being merely a repetitive cycle... In other words... Advent calls us to enter the cycle each year... with deeper understandings... wider horizons... and higher expectations... for ourselves and our world...

Pentecost's summer and autumn parables about the Kingdom... follow Jesus around the countryside... but now the Kingdom parables take on a character of harvest... and we hear this in the parables of the Ten Bridesmaids... and of the Talents... but these themes... call us not so much to cringe before an angry Judge who will wreak apocalyptic havoc on a creation gone bad... but call us instead... to our responsibilities as agents-in-Christ... of God's reign for a renewed creation... we are encouraged to look toward a hope that is neither millennialist nor rapturist... but a vision that we know from Handel's Messiah... that the kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of our God... and of his Christ... and He shall reign forever and ever...

Advent is a time of waiting... but not only for the birth of Jesus... Advent is a time of repentance... of turning from the ways in which we miss God's mark for us... Advent is a time of preparation... for us to receive as fully as possible... the fullness that God has in store not just for us individually... but corporately... and for all of creation...

For us here at Two Churches... Advent... the new church year... began on November 12... for much of Christianity... Advent began on December 3... but whether seven weeks or four... each year... we are called to enter the cycle anew... with deeper understandings... wider horizons... and higher expectations... for ourselves and our world...

And like Easter... which actually begins with the Vigil on Saturday evening... Christmas begins not at sunrise tomorrow morning... when many of us will open presents... Christmas begins not at midnight tonight... when some of us will be watching Christmas morning worship at the Vatican... but Christmas begins at 5:12 PM tonight... at sunset tonight... before our 8:30 service begins... because centuries ago... Christianity adopted a particular aspect of the Jewish calendar...

You see... according to the Jewish calendar... it's not only Jewish holidays... but every day... that begins at sunset... this understanding is based on the creation story in

Genesis... in the text that says... *and there was evening... and there was morning... the first day...* because there was first darkness... before God created light... darkness and then light... and by mentioning evening before morning... the Torah defines a day as beginning with the evening followed by the morning... and this understanding of the passage of time has profound implications for how many Jews view life itself...

Life is full of ups and downs... we all go through periods when the sun is shining on us... or when there are dark disappointments... but then the sun shines again... so does darkness extinguish light... or does light conquer darkness... does night follow day... or does day follow night... the Jewish view is clear... first the night... then the day... that's Jewish time... darkness is a pathway to the sunrise hiding behind it... that's the comfort in knowing that no matter how dark it may seem... it is light that will have the last word... and from our Christian scriptures... John 1:5 affirms... *The light shines in the darkness... and the darkness did not overcome it...*

The birth of God in Christ... brought us immeasurable light... not just in the visible spectrum... the kind of brightness that makes us squint... but the spiritual brightness of boundlessness... of forgiveness... it's the kind of spiritual brightness that brings us to our knees... because standing in front of it... is sometimes more than we can do... and this light speaks to us of new beginnings... of fresh starts... and while I believe that with God... all things are possible... I'm also careful to say that some things may not be probable... and I am not a probable person... I mean... who would have thought that a Jewish boy from Brooklyn... would convert to Christianity... come out... go to seminary... become a rector/pastor... and serve as Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer... I still have moments of awe about the awesome things God can do... but I don't think that God is done with any of us yet...

And who would have thought that Mary... a twelve or thirteen year old girl... would give birth to a child... in whom the fullness of God resided fully... that her openness to Gabriel's message... would enable her to receive God's Incarnate Word...

Are we as willing... as Mary was... to say yes to God... are we as willing to put ourselves... as she did... into a truly vulnerable position... with her family and her community... no matter the cost... are we willing to shift our attention from the manger... to the cosmos... from our elected leaders... to God as King... are we willing to go with God into uncharted territories... to places we've never been... are we willing to do nothing but trust totally and completely in God's mercy and guidance and wisdom and love to get us where we need to be... are we willing to risk leaving absolutely everything behind... what we know or think we know... who we are or think we are... the relationships we have and what we think they mean... are we willing to risk being abandoned by our parents and family and friends... and the securities on which we rely... are we willing... when we arrive at the other side of our journey... to be empty and empty handed... but also believe that we'll be more whole and better for it... are we willing to die to the life we have... in order to be born into a new one... as Jesus was...

At 5:12 this afternoon... our waiting will be over...

Mike+