



The Spirit of St. Mark's

Advent and Christmas

November 27, 2016

A MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

We all read novels differently. Some of us like to begin at page one and work faithfully through all the twists and turns of the plot until we arrive at the last page. Others of us actually prefer to skip ahead to the last chapter before returning to the opening chapter so that as we read we have a sense of what everything is moving towards.

We commence another church year with the season of Advent. In some ways, beginning with Advent is a little like reading the last chapter first in a novel. The church begins its liturgical year by directing our attention to the grand finale – Jesus' Second Coming and the fulfillment of all of God's promises in creation through his Son. The journey through Advent is the reading of a story backwards. We work our way back from Jesus' Second Coming at the outset of Advent to his First Coming in all the vulnerability and humility of a baby born in a feed-trough as Advent concludes and Christmas begins.

While it may seem back-to-front to those of us who like to begin with page one, what does Advent's announcing the end at the beginning and reading the story backwards teach us? Fr. Tim Connor at St. George's London highlights three learnings.

First, there is a point to it all. History has a purpose. Our lives are not random, chaotic and meaningless. It's not a case of just 'one damned thing after another' as Huxley lamented. God is moving us all towards his appointed end for all that God has created and restored. When we are tempted to despair because nothing seems to make sense, or that we appear to be taking steps backward, or that the challenges facing us seem insurmountable, it is good to recall that Someone has it all in hand. We reaffirm that our shared life has a goal and we can make choices on the basis of that goal. We allow God to shape our lives confident both in God's love for us and in God's desire and ability to make good on his promises to us. God's ultimate purpose for us and for all creation will prevail – an outcome the goodness of which is beyond our wildest imaginings.

Second, the story of Jesus unfolded just as God intended it to unfold. His birth in a barn in Bethlehem, his early years with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth, his public ministry of teaching and healing in Galilee, his trial, torture and execution





Jesus is God with a human face.

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in Jerusalem, his emerging from a stone-cold tomb three days later, and his ascending into heaven before his stunned disciples was all part of God's plan for the healing and restoration of everything God has made. What happened to Jesus was not some cosmic screw-up; God was not caught napping. On the contrary, we say that God makes himself fully known to us, fully present to us, not only in Jesus, but as Jesus. If we want to know what God looks like, we need look no further than Jesus. Jesus is God with a human face.

Third, because Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us and God for us, it means that Jesus is the key – the key to the unfolding of history and the key to the culmination of history. That's what Christmas is about. During Advent, we do ring the changes on different themes of our life in God through Christ: peace, hope, joy and love. What Christmas reminds us is that those themes find their most complete and fulsome expression not in a treatise, nor in a campaign, nor even in a movement. We see the perfection of these principles in a person – Jesus of Nazareth, the One whose birth Christmas is all about. Jesus shows us what these virtues look like in the cut-and-thrust of lived human life.

It is why Advent and Christmas belong together. If we do Christmas without Advent, we risk remaining mired in the past – a sentimental story about a baby who got off to a rough start in life without even a decent cot. If we do Advent without Christmas, we may be tempted to focus on this vague (and at times pretty scary) future which can frankly seem way 'out there.' We need both Advent and Christmas, reading backwards from the end to the beginning so that God can show us his presence and activity in moving all of creation to its appointed end through the life, death and resurrection of his Son. Of course, Advent and Christmas lead us into Epiphany, the season during which we gaze upon God's light shining in the face of his Son, a light that shines into the darkest corners of whatever we are living, a light that illumines our paths and guides us into the way of peace.

Felicity, Sophie, Lynn and I wish you all the hope, peace, joy and love Jesus embodies throughout the season of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. Together may we celebrate God's presence with us and God's work in and through us during these seasons of the new Church year.

Yours in Christ

Tim+



ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Sunday
BRUNCH

Join us for a 10:00 a.m. worship service on Sunday, January 1st and then plan to stay for brunch.

November 27th	1st Sunday of Advent Holy Communion (BCP) Holy Eucharist (BAS)	9:00 am 10:30 am
November 30th	Midweek Eucharist	10:00 am
December 4th	2nd Sunday of Advent Holy Communion (BCP) Holy Eucharist (BAS)	9:00 am 10:30 am
December 7th	Midweek Eucharist	10:30 am
December 9th	Messy Church <i>Theme: The Best Christmas Present</i>	5:00 pm
December 11th	3rd Sunday of Advent Holy Communion (BCP) Christmas Pageant <i>The Twelve Symbols of Christmas</i>	9:00 am 10:30 am
December 13th	Blue Christmas	7:00 pm
December 14th	Senior's Christmas Eucharist	11:00 am
December 18th	4th Sunday of Advent A Service of Lessons and Carols A Service of Lessons and Carols <i>(Reserve sacrament will be available following both services.)</i>	9:00 am 10:30 am
December 21st	Midweek Eucharist	10:30 am
December 24th	Christmas Eve Christmas Eucharist Christmas Eucharist Candlelight Eucharist	4:00 pm 7:00 pm 10:30 pm
December 25th	Christmas Day Christmas Eucharist (with carols)	10:00 am
January 1st	The Naming of Jesus Holy Eucharist (BAS)	10:00 am
January 8th	Baptism of the Lord Holy Communion (BCP) Holy Baptism (BAS)	9:00 am 10:30 am



Pageant rehearsal will be on Saturday, December 10th from 10 - 11 am followed by a snack and cookie decorating until noon.

May the Lord grant you and your loved ones love, joy and goodwill this Christmas.



A soup and sandwich lunch will follow the pageant on December 11th. A special visitor is expected as well!

FROM OUR CHURCH WARDENS

It is hard to believe that it is almost December. We have been busy all Fall with a variety of things. First, we are hoping to hire someone for the Office Coordinator position before the end of the year. In addition, we have posted the Youth Coordinator position as Erin and Adrian have resigned as of February 1st.

There have been some minor repairs this Fall including the front door frame and the parking lot around the sewer drain. New windows in Munro Hall will be installed December 1st.

Financially, the Wardens would like to sincerely thank you for your continued support of our mission. We are a little under our year-to-date budget for givings but trust that we will meet our financial targets by the end of the year.

Finally, Vicki, Steve and Christine would like to thank Jody for her many years of service on Parish council and as a warden. She has resigned her duties as a warden for personal reasons and we wish her all the best. We pray that she will find a way to continue to use her wonderful talents in service to the parish.

A Happy & Blessed Christmas,
Vicki, Jody, Steve & Christine

AN UPDATE FROM THE SERVERS' MUM

Our group was excited to have Matthew Redwood join us this Fall. We welcome him and hope he enjoys serving with us. He has received his training and has started offering his assistance at Sunday services. On November 27th, we presented Joshua Dejong and Keegan Ogilvie with their bronze crosses upon completion of their first year of serving. Congratulation boys, we are pleased that you are continuing to serve in this valuable ministry!

I am very excited to announce that the Servers' Guild will be wearing new albs starting in December. The current albs have served us well, and will be donated to a church in need. We hope you enjoy the new look of the Servers!

The Servers' Guild is pleased to be selling poinsettias again for Christmas. We are offering both red and white poinsettias; 6" pots for \$10, and 8" pots for \$20. The servers will continue to sell them on Sunday, November 27 and December 4 after both the 9 am and the 10:30 am services. Pick-up dates for those taking flowers home will be December 11th and 18th between 9:30 am and 12:00 pm. Please note that all poinsettias must be paid for at the time of order, by cash or cheque.

May God bless you and your loved ones as we celebrate the Christmas season.

Nina Cooper, Servers' "Mum"



If you wish, you may dedicate your poinsettia to be placed in the church for Christmas.

SOME NEWS AND NOTES

'I have come that you might have life and life in all its fullness,' Jesus promises us in John's Gospel (10.10). The fullness of our life together at St. Mark's is something for which I give thanks and pray that it may continue to witness to the One who gifts us this life in his Son.

The second Friday is becoming one of the highlights of the month for me. God is blessing us with continued growth in our Messy Church as we meet at 5pm to do crafts, listen to a story, sing and pray, and share a meal. I rejoice in the connections that are happening and the relationships that are developing. Whilst it all sounds simple enough, there is an inordinate amount of preparation that goes into each gathering. I am deeply grateful for Pat's leadership and for the contribution of members of the core team and our army of helpers, especially those who are preparing meals for over 80 people! Keep it up!

We enjoyed a double-header in our life on Oct 1. In the morning Neil Dunning and the Environment Committee organized a first-rate workshop on 'Greening Sacred Spaces.' There were over 30 in attendance as we listened to presentations from a variety of speakers (including Sarah Ogilvie) and a panel discussion from local tradespeople. With recent statistics indicating that the 15 of the 16 hottest years on record have occurred this century (the other was in 1998), it is vital that we keep looking at ways in which faith communities can offer leadership in reducing our carbon footprint. It is a privilege to be serving a community which is bearing a torch for others. Well done! In the afternoon, the Brant Anglican Refugee Committee hosted a meet-and-greet for our Syrian family: Khaled and Nour, their children Walid and Alisar, and Khaled's mum, Nawal. There was a steady stream of folk throughout the afternoon and some great food. The family is coping so well with what remains a significant transition for them. My heartfelt thanks for your support of them in all manner of ways. Both Khaled and Nawal have needed extensive dental treatment which has been costly, even with a substantial discount offered by a local dentist. The Committee continues to welcome donations (which qualify for a tax receipt).

It is heartening to get together with Anglicans throughout Brantford and Brant County for Christian formation. We have just concluded a six week series on Wednesday evenings called *'Spirit of Invitation'*, a resource from the Diocese of Toronto. Through a blend of Scripture, video clips and personal stories we have considered different ways in which we can share our faith,



Join us on the second Friday of each month for crafts, stories, music and a home-cooked meal.



We can share our faith in ways that don't feel forced, contrived or aggressive.



From Nov. 27th to Dec. 4th, the children's offering will go toward the purchase of Christmas gifts for the parish sponsored Syrian family.

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and invite family, friends, colleagues and neighbours to explore a relationship with God for themselves. Rev. Brad Johnson has a gift for making Bible stories come alive in his passionate and engaging style. Our thanks to those who supported the series and assisted with set-up and refreshments. We next meet on Wed. Dec. 7 at 6.30pm to watch and discuss the movie *Amazing Grace* over coffee and dessert. Love to see you there!

Some of you will recall the Bennett family's time with us at St. Mark's from 1986-1991. The Diocese gave Bishop Bob and Kathie a rousing send-off on Fri. Oct. 14th as a number of folk paid tribute to their ministry in Huron spanning 42 years. We pray for them both as they move into a well-earned retirement. Breaking news is that Bishop Linda's installation as the 13th Bishop of Huron on Sat. Nov. 26 will not be at St. Paul's Cathedral but at Metropolitan United Church, owing to structural issues with the trusses at the Cathedral. Please pray for Bishop Linda as she picks up the reins in particularly challenging times, and pray for the Cathedral community as they make difficult decisions about care for our mother church.

Many of you probably roll your eyes when you hear mention of a visioning conversation! At the same time, these conversations remain so important for discerning the priorities we believe God is laying on our hearts at St. Mark's. Marilyn Malton returned on Sun. Oct. 23 to facilitate our discussion. I am grateful to those who attended and offered their reflections. We took time to name places of celebration and of pain and challenge this past year, and reviewed the recommendations put forward by Kayla Forrester and Adrian in their Community Engagement report. We continue to focus on those priorities we identified two years ago:

- Children, youth and young families
- Connecting with others
- Sharing God's gifts

Specifically in 2017, we will explore ways in which we can incorporate more of our children and youth into our Sunday worship at 10.30am on a regular basis. We will also investigate offering a regular movie night for kids on a Friday evening between Messy Church gatherings and look to advertise those in the community housing complexes in our neighbourhood. We recognize that we will need to give continued attention to our finances as the costs of ministry climb – ministry costs; good ministry costs more. We want to promote and encourage a culture of generosity as a primary way of responding to God's unfathomable generosity and kindness towards us.

Offering Envelopes



Envelopes for 2017 will be available on December 11th. Please speak with Anne Walker if you wish to change your method of giving.

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One of the many ways in which I sense the Holy Spirit moving in our midst is through our engagement with our sisters and brothers from Six Nations. Our Sacred Circle continues to offer events to assist with this process. The Province of Ontario recently observed its inaugural Treaties Recognition Week from Nov. 6-13. A Lutheran/Anglican working group organized a Blanket Exercise which we hosted on Wed. Nov. 9 and two presentations on treaties at the Woodland Cultural Centre followed by a talking circle at the Mohawk Chapel on Sun. Nov. 13. Attendance exceeded our expectations at both events. I was especially grateful for the support of our MPP Dave Levac, who strongly encouraged us to offer programmes next year. It is a superb way of connecting with those beyond our walls.

As I write, Jim Howarth is receiving the last of the boxes for Operation Christmas Child. He tells me that we have exceeded last year's total of 2009 boxes by 466 boxes for a total of 2475. We are deeply grateful to all those who have assisted with this significant logistical exercise and who have contributed boxes. It is a service to the people of Brantford and of course to the Northern communities who will be the recipients of your generosity. God bless you all.

The Fall has been a time of significant transition for us as a community. We acknowledge with gratitude the significant contribution Christine Pizzey made to the administrative side of our life in the nearly two years she was with us. I am particularly grateful for the generosity of Kathy Dunning and Anne Walker in providing interim coverage in the office as the wardens seek to fill the position of parish coordinator. Erin and Adrian have informed the wardens that they will not be renewing their contract when Erin's maternity leave concludes in February. The wardens are hoping to appoint a youth ministry coordinator in the early New Year in order to provide some overlap before Adrian finishes up. Both Erin and Adrian have invested significantly in the lives of our youth on a number of levels for which we are very grateful. We shall miss them and wish them all well as they explore exciting ministry opportunities in Kitchener-Waterloo.

Our principal fundraiser is the Holly Jolly Faire, requiring substantial preparation. As you may be aware, the Smiths relocated to Germany over the summer which made it somewhat difficult for Crystal to continue as HJF coordinator! Laurie Murray and Vicki Corke stepped into the breach in September (aided and abetted by their husbands I understand) and have gone above and beyond in pulling things together on behalf of us all. We owe them and their team a huge debt of gratitude. Whilst we don't yet know what the Faire will generate, I can tell you that without their efforts we would have a much larger gap to make up before year end. Thanks so much.

On your behalf, I want to thank our wardens for their tireless commitment to our



There was a huge display of sharing the gifts of our community as seen in the endless line of packing crates filled with shoeboxes.



Please help us to keep in touch with you by letting us know if your contact information changes. You are important to us!



A donation of \$50 will provide a family of 5 with breakfast, lunch and a turkey dinner with all of the trimmings.

Cash donations can be included in your church envelope marked Christmas Baskets.

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life and well-being. Their contribution risks being overlooked. They take their role seriously and are called upon to make difficult and sometimes painful decisions on our behalf. They carry significant responsibility and the more so, as the rules and regulations governing our life become more complex and the resources they have to work with diminish. Please take time to remind them of your appreciation for all they do. We acknowledge in particular Jody Ogilvie's service these past five years. Her dedication to this parish across several areas of our life is inspiring, and I am particularly grateful for her loyalty and dependability as Rector's warden these past two years.

... Lastly, for our services during Advent and Christmas please see the schedule on page 3. We have so much to look forward to! We would love to see you here as often as you are able!

CHRISTMAS OUTREACH

Gift Cards - The people of St. Mark's have been extremely generous in providing gifts for those who attend the Daily Bread Christmas dinner at Grace Church. Thank you so much to those who have donated to the gift cards for this year and to the organizers of the Holly Jolly Faire for giving 10% of the proceeds to the cards. We still have a long way to go to reach our goal of \$5000. Donations can be made through your envelopes marked *Daily Bread Gift Cards*. We need your gift by December 11th. Thank you for your support of this ministry to the needy in our community.

Cookies for Seniors - For many years members of the Ladies' Guild, along with the generous support of the members of the parish, have prepared containers of cookies to give to our Seniors at the Christmas Senior Service and Lunch. Cookies are delivered to those Seniors who are unable to come to the Lunch. Wednesday, December 14th at 10:00 am is the scheduled time to prepare these cookie containers. You are invited to bring in your cookies on Sunday, December 11th, or during office hours from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on December 12th and 13th and until 10:00 am on December 14th.

Thank you for your donation. Our Seniors appreciate being able to offer a 'little bit of sweetness' to their guests during the holiday season.

Christmas Basket Programme - Each year, we always hope that there will be less need, but unfortunately, many families are not able to find the resources to provide the extras that many of us have become accustomed to. Your donation can make a huge difference for many in our community. Let's do our part and help someone feel special and cared-for during this wonderful time of year. Donations boxes are available in St. Mark's Hall.



Your donations of toys, canned cranberry sauce and fruit, mittens, toques and scarves will provide hope to our neighbours through the Christmas Basket programme.