

- A GRAIN OF MUSTARDSEED -

Dear Friends in Christ:

December 2023

In Advent we ponder Christ's coming (Lt. "advenire"): His first coming as the Babe of Bethlehem at Christmas; His present coming in the power of the Spirit through Word and Sacrament; and especially His coming at the end of time to be our Judge. We therefore focus on the great themes of death, judgement, heaven and hell and prepare ourselves, by a renewed commitment at the beginning of the new Church year to the disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Right living in this world means living in anticipation of the next. Christians of the early Church knew this well: they were more eager for Christ's second coming than we are *and* they were more faithful to Christ. That contrast is both humbling and instructive. The New Testament and the Fathers of the early Church speak often of the second advent of Christ. Jesus talks about it himself in Matthew 24 and St. Paul, in the midst of a description of the resurrection from the dead, writes about it in 1 Corinthians 15. For Jesus and Paul the **fact** that the Messiah will return demands of the reader a change in behavior and belief, because He returns as Judge of the living and the dead. Many contemporary scholars appraise the early Christians with the judgement that they were fools for believing that Christ would return. After all, He didn't, did He? I reckon they make that judgement because they don't believe He will return at all, and certainly not for any task as unsavory as judgement! All that, to the worldly mind, is delusional naiveté. I suppose it doesn't help that we have had, throughout the history of the Church, those who presumed to predict the precise time of Christ's coming, despite His teaching us the folly of all that (Matt. 24:36). But the criticism of such presumption ought not to include a criticism of the expectant attitude of the early Church. The early Christians weren't saying *when* Christ was coming but *that* Christ was coming and that such an arrival would be at a time when they knew not. "How do we," they asked themselves, "want to be found when He arrives?" The answer was and is "to be found faithful." That's why the prayer of *faith* in Advent is "come Lord, quickly." I think the early Church Fathers might have been prophets, anticipating the materialistic perversions of our celebrations of Christ's first coming, when they instituted the penitential season of Advent before Christmas: a time for prayerful meditation on His second coming. Advent is the Church's answer to the season's mindless consumerism and silly fluff: May yours be holy and prayerful. May you find yourself anticipating not only the joyful commemoration of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, but His imminent return as our Judge.

In Christ, Edward L. Rix

ADVENT ACTIVITIES

As in all penitential seasons, we add to our Sunday devotions the service of Evening Prayer in the Lady Chapel each week at 4:00 pm. This year Timothy Broussard will be offering meditations on the Old and New Testament readings at each of these services, including Christmas Eve at 4:00 pm. Additionally on the First Sunday in Advent, Dec. 3, St. Nicholas will make his annual visit during Fellowship Hour in anticipation of his commemoration on the 6th. Our Advent Quiet Day is a little later this year, on the 16th of December from 8:00 am to 2:30 pm. The Advent Ember Days are kept with services of Holy Communion in the Lady Chapel on the 20th, 22nd and 23rd, the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle coming in their midst and kept with Holy Communion at our regular Thursday time on the 21st. And Advent Lessons and Carols will be at the 10:00 am service on Sunday the 10th. We pray a good and holy Advent for all members of the parish.

GREENING OF THE CHURCH

Christmas falls on a Monday this year, so the Fourth Sunday in Advent is also Christmas Eve (see the changes to our Christmas Eve service schedule below). So we will forgo our usual decorating after services on the Sunday before Christmas and have a mid-week Greening on Wednesday, December 20th at 7:00 p.m. Hot cider and cookies will be provided (perhaps a carol or two will be sung!). Many hands make light work, as the saying goes, so please join us for this annual event.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES – NOTE CHANGES!

Note that there are no changes to our normal service times on the Fourth Sunday in Advent: 7:30 am Morning Prayer, 8:00 am Holy Communion, 10:00 am Morning Prayer, 11:15 am Holy Communion, 4:00 pm Evening Prayer. **However we have a major change to our Christmas Eve services this year:** In place of the 5:00 pm and 11:00 "Midnight Mass" services, there will be a choral prelude at 7:00 pm followed by a Festal Holy Communion service with choir and string quintet at 7:30 pm. For those who would still like to make their communion closer to midnight there will be a low mass celebrated in the Lady Chapel at 11:30 pm. On Christmas Day we have sung Holy Communion with Brass at 10:00 am. On the Feast Days following (St. Stephen, Holy Innocents, St. John the Evangelist) we have daily Communion at 10:00 am. We observe the First Sunday after Christmas with our normal Sunday services, excepting a service of Christmas Carols and Lessons at 10:00 am. The Octave Day of Christmas and Feast of the Circumcision is kept with Communion at 10:00 am on New Year's Day and the Epiphany is kept on Saturday the 6th of January with an Evening service of Communion at 7:00 pm in the Church, followed by a pot-luck dessert party at the Rectory.



"The kingdom of God...is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it." *St. Luke 13:18-19*