

Sermon - Advent 3, December 11, 2011

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The harvest has been collected and stored for the long winter months ahead – family and friends have gathered together to enjoy some of the best fruits of the harvest and to reminisce, share recent news of family, and celebrate the passing of another year. People seem especially attentive to neighbors in the community who have had bad luck and have little to share and rejoice about. For a short while - young and old, rich and poor, strangers and neighbors - relax, enjoy, and share what they have with others. Thanksgiving is a holiday that usually ignores religious, geographic, and political lines.

But then the spell is broken, and seemingly much more so in our commercialized and consumerist society. The Pilgrim Fathers went back to the fields and storerooms, prepared their work animals for winter and tightened up their homes against the anticipated cold weather and SNOW. On the other hand, many of us got out shopping on Black Friday (perhaps not the mall or a BIG store, but to snatch up a deal). We consult our to-do lists so all the festivities of the Christmas season can be fitted in, and change the color schemes of our homes with green plants, red ribbons, and bright lights. With

Thanksgiving coming earlier this warmish fall, the sounds of the Messiah and other more secular holiday music jar our ears.

Suddenly, like a short sound bite – summer is over, the harvest has been gathered and stored away for later use, the kids are finally all settled and busy with school work – It's A New Year!

And – at St Luke's the altar colors are changed, young and old choristers prepare for special musical offerings for Christmas. A decorated tree appears in the atrium, gifts are collected to share with the community, and we welcome Heather MacDonald back from her mission trip to the DR. In mid-November we put our best foot forward as we host Diocesan Convention and anticipate the continuation of our search process for a new rector. Our energy and anticipation is high.

But wait. Stop and listen. There is sound/noise all around us – music, someone else's cell phone jingling away, busy traffic noises, early morning news broadcasts, television and radio commentators freely offering their expert opinion about the issue of the day (which may be different tomorrow), cries for help from people in distress. There is so much sound this time of year that we automatically turn it off – or we just listen but do not really hear.

However, this special time of year is a time when we should stop and listen – EVEN if we think we know the Advent message, even if we have heard the story and heard the music before.

What do we hope to hear when we arise each new day – that all will be well - that there have been no accidents or fires or shootings overnight – that two new businesses are coming into the state to bring employment for 5000 people – that a clerical error in the state budget has resulted in a 2 million dollar surplus – that all talk show hosts are taking five days off – that there have been no new deaths in Afghanistan for a week - that that there will be no snow until Christmas eve.

What do you hope to hear today?

Two thousand years ago, the Jewish people hoped to hear that the Messiah had come. And a strange man appeared in the wilderness proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Many people came to him and were baptized in the river Jordan and confessed their sins and asked – who are you, are you the Messiah. No, he said, slow down, I am not the Messiah, one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to tie the lacings of his sandals. I baptized you with water but he will baptize

you with the Holy Spirit. Wait and watch and prepare the way of the Lord

Should the crowd believe John? Was he just another wandering prophet? He certainly looked pretty strange.

Today, think of who we believe and trust and listen to. There are certainly many folks who want to tell us what they think and what we should consider and do. And we too, like the Jews two thousand years ago, look for a new Messiah or savior, someone to help us in times of trouble. Who do we turn to?

Here's the big clue and it was found at the beginning of today's gospel message – ***“There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him. He was not the light but he came to testify to the light.”*** That's the clue – John was **SENT BY GOD** – that was the validity of his message.

Those of us gathered here today, those who know the Nativity story and the message of the risen Christ, - we know how to tell what is true and right – we profess a certain faith and recite a certain creed, we listen to and read scripture, we gather in community to worship the risen Christ.

We also lose our way. We need to stop, slow down, and listen to what God is saying to us. In the midst of preparation for the birth of the baby we need to savor each of the preparatory days of Advent – to remind ourselves of what Baby Jesus, not the Messiah but the Savior will be bringing to each of our lives and rejoicing in our own baptism, not with water but with the Holy Spirit. That is how we will know what we should believe and do.

AMEN