



LOGOS

The Newsletter for St. John's Episcopal Church, Arlington

"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it" John 1:5

December 2013

From the Rector: The Gifts of Christmas

It was a little jarring to see the Christmas decorations up by the Halloween candy. It is odd to hear pre-Black Friday ads on the radio and see them in the newspapers. Retailers are extending the Christmas season, stretching it just as much as they can to turn a good profit. They want us to buy lots and lots of gifts.

Extending the Christmas season is not a bad thing though, if we think about the gifts of the heart that Christmas brings. God gives us all that we have and all that we are as gifts and it is especially important at Christmas to be thankful for the gifts God pours into our lives all the time.

The first one I think of is abundance. We may have an abundance of lists, an abundance of family and friends, an abundance of food, an abundance of Christmas decorating to do. All of this abundance reminds us of the abundance of life God wants us to have. Brother Geoffrey Tristram of the Society of St. John the Evangelist (SSJE) says that God longs for us to "reach out and grasp the fullness of life which he has prepared for us. And he loves us too much to allow us to settle for anything less."

Abundance is the doorway to other gifts we experience especially strongly at Christmas. We have an abundance of hope. Hope is what keeps us going in the midst of life's storms. Hope is knowing you have friends to help you face difficult

situations. Hope is knowing your own strength. Hope is believing that a savior has come, is here, and will return to help us endure with patience the situation we have before us. We act out of hope at Christmas when we open Advent calendars, sing Christmas carols and read Bible stories about the coming of the Lord to be our guardian and guide.

Joy can also fill our hearts at Christmas. It is such a beautiful time of the year if we do not get lost in all the things we have to do. Joy is more than happiness; it is something we feel deep down inside us, knowing that God loves us enough to send us Jesus. The Lord tells Nehemiah, who faced opposition when he tried to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile that "the joy of the Lord is your strength." It is our strength, too. The joy of a relationship with God is the encouragement we need to do all we have to do and be all we have to be in this busy world.

Peace is another Christmas gift. Of course there is peace that comes when the last card is sent, the last package bought, the last tinsel strand put on the tree. But deep peace, the peace that passes understanding, is about knowing God, about knowing that we are infinitely loved and can rest in God's arms, knowing that everything will turn out okay. Peace takes surrender to God's will in our lives, and that is hard, but it is worth it.

Here is a gift we may not take to so easily:

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change. Our families change, our Christmas traditions change, our lives change in between Christmases, sometimes making us uncomfortable with what we used to do. We are left scrambling for security. But maybe what we really need to do is experience the change, because it may lead to new God-filled paths for us.

Love is that emotional bond that we hope surrounds us always, but especially at Christmas. It is the glue that holds relationships together, the heart-opener that leads to forgiveness and reconciliation, the eye-opener that helps us see those we serve as God's children, too. It is the raw material of our lives together in community. It is a great gift to know we have God's love, which helps us to love one another.

The most important gift we are given at Christmas is the gift of the incarnation. God reached out to us, clothing Godself in human flesh, to give us Jesus, someone we might relate to, learn from and through whom experience the wonder of all that is the kingdom of God. He helped us live

our humanity fully by showing us how to relate to the divine.

Christmas is indeed a time for gifts. I invite you to enjoy buying something special for those you love, but to enjoy even more the gifts that God has given us at Christmas and throughout the year.

Ann †

November 2013 Vestry Highlights

The vestry received the Finance Committee's draft budget for 2014, reviewed it, and requested a number of changes. Further changes can be made until the vote on the budget is taken at the December vestry meeting.

The Junior Warden reported her plans to hire a new part-time sexton by January. The position will be advertised at area churches and in the Glencarlyn newsletter.

The vestry approved donating 10 percent of this year's fund raising efforts to AFAC.

Coming in December

- December 3 – St. John's Book Club will discuss *Still Life* by Louise Penny. January's book club selection is *Funny in Farsi* by Firouzeh Dumas.
- December 13 – St. John's volunteers will be bagging groceries at AFAC from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Let Faye Pritchard know if you want to help, since we would like to have at least ten volunteers. Also let Faye know if you need a sit-down job – jobs for varying abilities are available!
- December 15 at the 10 a.m. service we will have the Children's Christmas pageant, with sets, costumes and lots of fun. Be sure to come see this traditional event!
- December 15, following the 10 a.m. service we will have St. John's annual Christmas cookie exchange. Bring a dozen or two of your favorite Christmas cookies and trade them for some else's favorites. It is a great way to be introduced to a variety of tasty Christmas cookies!
- December 15, 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. – Christmas caroling in the nave. Come and singing traditional carols as we approach Christmas.
- December 24, Christmas Eve – 5:00 p.m. Eucharist with children's message; 11:00 p.m. Eucharist
- December 25, Christmas Day Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Words on Hymns

“Why can’t we sing Christmas carols during Advent?” I hear you cry. “All we usually get is Christmas Eve and the Lessons and Carols service. That’s not enough!”

The short answer is because it’s not time yet. The season of Advent marks the beginning of the Christmas season and the Church year for most Western churches. In the 4th and 5th centuries, Advent was the preparation for the "Epiphany" rather than Christmas. It was also a time for new Christians to be baptized and welcomed into the church, while members of the church examined their hearts and focused on penance. Religious leaders exhorted the people to prepare for the feast of Christmas by fasting. Some say that early documents show that those leaders treated Advent as a second Lent. The Orthodox Churches still do observe an Advent fast for 40 days leading up to Epiphany.

Sometime in 6th century Rome, the focus of Advent shifted to the second coming of Christ. In the 9th century, Pope St. Nicholas reduced the duration of Advent from six weeks to the four weeks we currently observe. And finally, sometime in the middle ages – approximately the 1500's – an additional focus on the anticipation before Christ's birth was added to that of his second coming.

For Christians, Advent is a time of reflection about the gift that God gave to us in the person of his son who came to live among us on earth. It is also an opportunity to reflect upon “the reason for the season” amid the secular festivities, lights and decorations we all enjoy. Advent is, appropriately, both somber and joyful. The prevailing themes of the Advent season and the symbolism behind the activities which churches and families share are expectation and hope, preparation and peace, joy and sharing, and most of all, love.

The practice of lighting Advent candles began in Germany by non-Christians. They lit candles surrounded by evergreen branches in their

windows on cold winter nights to signify their hope for the coming warmth and light of spring. Later, German Lutherans kept the practice alive and gradually the symbolism of the Advent wreath was added: evergreens represent everlasting life (because they do not die during winter) and Christian growth; the wreath is a symbol of God's unending love and of victory; candles represent Christ, the light of the world, and their purple or blue color signify the royalty of Jesus our King. The pink candle is a holdover from the time when seven candles were lit during Lent, one for each week. The third week, churches were encouraged to celebrate the coming resurrection with a pink candle to signify joy. The idea of candles was later adopted for Advent. Another tradition says that the four candles signify the 4000 years of waiting from Adam and Eve until, at long last, Jesus's birth.

So, as lovely and beloved as Christmas carols are, to sing them before Christmas Eve would be taking away some of the anticipation. It’s like waiting for a long-desired trip – it’s all the more enjoyable for having time to reflect on it, rather than deciding one day to go, and leaving the next. How can you sing “Happy Birthday” to someone before the day has arrived? You wouldn’t send out birth announcements before the child is born. We might as well sing “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today” during Lent. After all, Easter hymns are much more cheerful than Lenten ones.

So take the time of Advent to prepare for Christmas – not just your shopping, wrapping and decorating, but the inner you as well. “To everything there is a season and a purpose under heaven.” Enjoy singing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”, “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” and “Prepare the Way, O Zion”. The season of Christmas will be upon us, and the carols will ring forth all the more joyfully for the wait.

Carol Dunlap

Parish News

The adult education class will do an Advent study in December. Possible topics for January include unnamed heroes of the Bible and classes based on books called *Saving Salvation* and *Forgiven and Forgiving*. Please join us. Whatever we are studying, the discussions are always stimulating.

- Congratulations to Michael Cavey, who made his First Communion Sunday November 17
- Welcome to Anne Stenger, who is singing with the choir
- Best Wishes to Billie Jean Keith, who has moved back to Mississippi to live near family. We will miss you!

Thank you

- To Linda Trochim for chairing the finance committee in John Wilson's absence.
- To Lenore Schmidt and all her helpers who made our parish cleanup day so successful.
- To Virginia Pearson for serving as the vestry register for the past year and to Bill Thomson who has agreed to take over.
- To Sandy Winger, who has become our press release liaison.
- To Matthew Hubbard, who is our new parish photographer.
- To Kaipo McCartney for coordinating the Thanksgiving potluck.

December Birthdays

The Rev. Catherine Campbell, Eileen Flynn, Madeline "Maddie" Harbin, Lori Held, Galen Henderson, Barbara Hill, Del Hunt, Vernon Martin, Barbara Olivere, Angie Rollet, Angela Swarr, Camron Tallent, Laura Wallace

December Anniversaries

David & Carol Dunlap, Klaus & Lori Held, Don & Penny Hess, Cooper & Mary Mackin

St. John's Mission Statement

We welcome everyone including believers, seekers and doubters to share God's love and acceptance in a community of worship and service.

St. John's Vision Statement

St. John's is dedicated to nurturing disciples for Jesus by:

- Offering faith-deepening worship, education, outreach and pastoral care;
- Attracting and welcoming newcomers; and
- Sharing God's love with our community and the world around us.

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The LOGOS is published monthly except August, near the beginning of the month.

Dave Dunlap is the LOGOS Editor.

Articles for LOGOS may be Emailed to dave_dunlap@yahoo.com (preferred) or left at the church office.

Material for the January issue should be submitted no later than December 21.