

Advent 1C

St James and Good Shepherd, Laconia, NH

December 1, 2024

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How do you measure your time? Do you evaluate by what you have accomplished? Is it based on the weather? Here in New England, it is hard not to account for the weather. Do you measure it by politics – presidential election year, midterms or local elections? Maybe you measure it by your age – 20's, 30's, 40's.... or stage of life – young adult, parent, grandparent, working or retired. We have many ways to measure our time. Our culture tends to measure it by consumerism – Black Friday, Cyber Monday – our holiday Christmas decorations go up earlier and earlier each year. Maybe a few of you measure your time by liturgical season.

Today is the start of the church calendar. It always starts four Sundays before Christmas – the four Sundays of Advent. Today we use, for the first time, the Blue Altar Frontal Set. Saint James ordered it for last year, but it came in wrong, so here it is now! Thank you, Sally and others! Traditionally, Blue or Purple are the colors used for Advent. Purple is considered penitential, or the color that symbolizes asking for forgiveness. We use purple during Lent, the season before Easter. Blue, I think, more accurately reflects the season of Advent, a cosmic color, the color that surrounds us in water and sky. Blue is my favorite color, and maybe it is yours too. Blue is calm and tranquil, a reflective or meditative color. Are you all feeling meditative? No, I thought not. 24 shopping days left to Christmas. So much to do! The busy season seems to ramp up earlier and earlier each year.

So, you are here this morning to remember that there are other ways to mark the passing of time. Christmas is not about Santa and gifts under the tree, but spending time with family and friends. Christmas is not about the best decorations or the best food, but about taking a deep breath and reflecting on all that we have been given.

Our Advent readings are cosmic in nature, helping us to remember that there are bigger things to consider than our particular needs in any moment. Advent is like setting a reset, taking a pause to remember that God is bigger than us. That the universe continues with or without our best efforts. That what we worry about is often not important, and that the arc of history continues, despite setbacks and bumps. This does not mean we just sit back and let things happen, but we can trust that when we put in our best effort, God's Will will prevail. God's arc of history will be fulfilled. We need to do our part. And it starts with Advent.

Take a breath. We all need time to reset. Nature needs it and so do we. Take a breath. Remember that God loves you, remember that God walks with us, remember that love will prevail, remember that Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, and that we all need time to prepare our hearts and minds to accept that gift. To know that through God's great love for us, a child will be born. Remember and breathe.

We seem to prepare well when it involves things to do, but we seem to be less attentive when preparation involves strengthening our spiritual life, spending quiet time with God and ourselves. This is what Jesus asks of us, be prepared – not in the societal

sense but in a spiritual way. Advent is a time to reflect on how God is in our lives and how we can strengthen that connection.

There was a time when this was a quiet time of year, a time before the Christmas machine got going, a time when the work was done and the land was resting. It is up to us to reclaim some of that time, to rest, to reflect, to pray, to see where God is calling us in this part of our lives. To enliven our prayer with fire, fire of the new light we are preparing for. To stoke that fire, so that our hearts may be changed, and our faith transformed. I believe that this is the gift of Christmas.

So, take time this Advent season, to set your heart ablaze, to light the light of Christ in your heart and to let it transform your world. So that when Christmas comes you will see in new ways, with a loving and transformed heart, with a renewed sense of hope, joy and faith. Happy Advent! Amen