

The Master's Message

The Newsletter of the Church of the Master

December, 2023

Virtual Adult Bible Study
Wednesday, 7:00 PM
Saturday, 12:00

2783 Lafayette Avenue
Bronx, N.Y. 10465
718-597-6298

Sunday Worship
Sunday 11:00 am

cotm47@verizon.net

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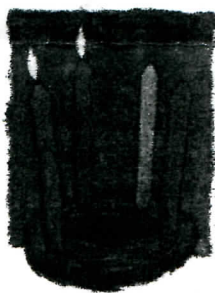
Rev. Dr. Melva J. Hayden, Pastor

We are stepping onto the path of another church year. Ahead lie the four weeks of the

Season of Advent

For those who know what to look for, familiar sights and sounds fill the four weeks of Advent. They help set an attitude and a readiness to receive our Savior—and that's what Christmas, our destination, is all about, isn't it?

But Advent is not about *us*, it is about *the One who is coming* (the meaning of the word "advent" is "coming"). And the weeks of Advent are a time of preparation for the Lord's arrival.



Advent helps Christian people prepare each other to receive the promised Savior—and to receive him in each of his *three* comings!

- First, our celebration of Christmas marks our Lord's coming into the world once, two thousand years ago.
- Second, our celebration of his presence among us here and now and in his Supper marks his coming to us today.
- Third, our celebration of his promise to return as the victorious Judge over evil marks his final coming at the end of time.

And what is this Advent attitude? Early Christians in western Europe, who shaped much of North American Christianity, treated the month before Christmas in two ways.



From the early Christians in Rome we inherited the attitude that Advent is a time of joyous remembrance of the incarnation of God in the Christ-child long ago.

From early Christians in northern Europe we inherited the attitude that Advent is a time to "clean house" spiritually in preparation for the Lord's final coming.

Today these two attitudes continue side by side. They give our observance of Advent specific Scripture readings, terms and symbols that lead us to introspection and renewal, as well as to exuberant joy and celebration as we travel toward Christmas.



SPECIAL DATES*

- First Sunday of Advent, December 3rd
- Pearl Harbor Day, December 7th
- Second Sunday of Advent, December 10th
- Third Sunday of Advent, December 17th
- First Day of Winter, December 21st
- Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 24th
- Christmas Eve, December 24th
- Christmas Day, December 25th
- New Year's Eve, December 31st

News From the Pews



Prayer Requests

Continue praying for:
Ellen McCullough (broken femur),
Allen Ford, Carole Mahon,
Loretta Byrd, Alice & Alex Rivera

Everyone is invited to join our virtual "**Hour of Prayer Power**" every Friday at 7:00 PM. The conference call-in number is 605-475-4860, code: 371231#

Our Online Bible Study meets
Wednesday at 7:00 PM and Saturday at 12:00.
Contact Ron Rivera (917-716-8273)
for information on joining



Advent is here

December 3 is the First Sunday of Advent. It is the day when the church officially begins to prepare for Christmas. Advent means "coming," therefore, we make ready for the coming of the Lord.

Where should we begin? With ourselves, of course. We should prepare our hearts for Christ to live in them fully. Get rid of the clutter within — the odds and ends of foolish thoughts and familiar sins we find difficult to "let go and let God handle." Advent is heart-cleaning time, so call in the Holy Spirit Cleaning Service, and make room for the best Guest anyone ever had. Start now! Let the Spirit "Cast out our sin and enter in. Be born in us today" (from "O Little Town of Bethlehem").

The cleaning service has a guarantee: "When our 'Worker' finishes with your heart, you'll have the best Christmas ever!"

CHURCH CHUCKLES

Doug was leaving church after Christmas services when Father McCarthy took him aside. "Douglas, my son," he said, "It's time you joined the Army of the Lord. We need to see you every Sunday."

"I'm already in the Army of the Lord, Father," Doug replied.

"Then why do we only see you on Christmas and Easter?"

Doug looked to the right and to the left, and then leaned over to whisper in Father McCarthy's ear. "I'm in the Secret Service"

When Lucy's philosophy professor discovered she was a Christian, he targeted her for debate. She more than held her own, however.

He asked her to explain to him how any book could possibly be taken seriously that claims a man could stay alive in the belly of a giant fish for three days.

"I can't explain that, sir," Lucy answered. "However, when I get to heaven, I will ask Jonah myself how it was accomplished."

"And if Jonah isn't in heaven?" challenged the professor.

"Well, sir, then I suppose you can ask him yourself."



Border crossers

A retired minister often relaxed by sitting on his deck and letting his mind roam while he fed peanuts to squirrels. He named one particular squirrel Squeak because it often squeaked as if to say, "Bring out the nuts!"

Although there were many squirrels that came for the picnic, Squeak was the only one courageous enough to reach out for a nut held between the man's fingers. The pastor realized that it took bravery for Squeak to cross the unseen border between the yard and the hand holding the nut. Squeak was willing to do what other squirrels would not — take a risk to gain a reward. Squeak was a brave border crosser.

The preacher thought, "Shouldn't Christians be daring border crossers as well?"

He thought about the Christians throughout history who had put their lives on the line for the cause of Christ: the apostles — most of whom were martyred; the countless missionaries who established churches, schools and hospitals in lands where the name of Christ was unknown. Church history is full of stories about Christians who crossed borders to tell the "old, old story of Jesus and his love."

Are you willing to be a border crosser for Christ's sake?

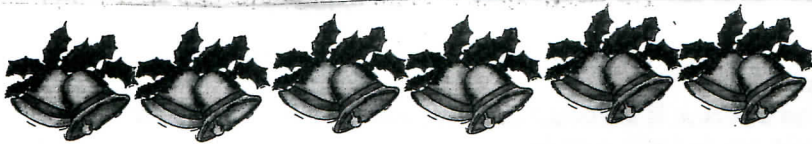
Inspiring Quote

"Perhaps the greatest test of love is the way we act in times of need"

-Suleka Jaouad

Hooray for snow!

In a northern community, it snowed consistently for so long that the schools had to be closed for the better part of a week. When classes resumed, a teacher asked her students if they had used their free time constructively. One little girl said, "I did. I was enjoying my free time so much that I prayed for more snow."



- It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child Himself.

—Charles Dickens

- How many observe Christ's birthday! How few, his precepts! O! 'tis easier to keep holidays than commandments.

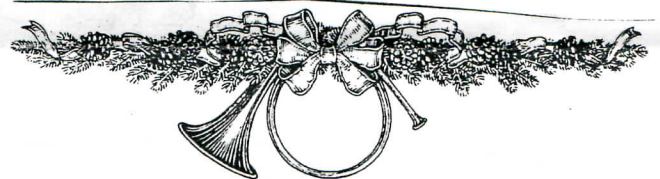
—Benjamin Franklin



Make a happy Christmas

How can you make this the happiest Christmas of your life? Simply by trying to give yourself to others. Put something of yourself into everything you give. A gift, however small, speaks its own language. And when it tells of the love of the giver, it is truly blessed.

—Norman Vincent Peale

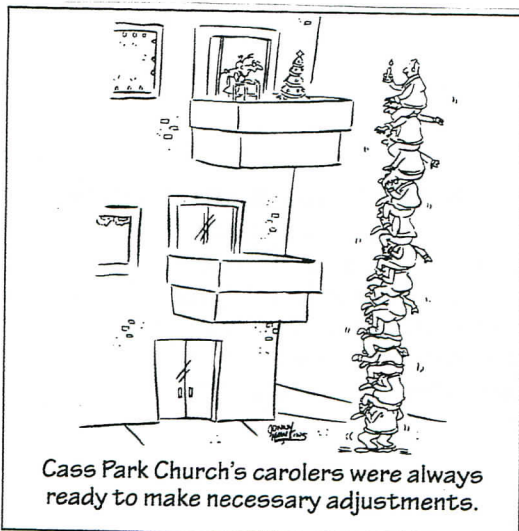


Never the same again

After the birth of Jesus, the shepherds returned to the same old world from whence they came. Yet, there must have been a new excitement in that familiar world. Life must have taken on new meaning, for no one is ever the same again after being in the presence of the Lord.

Rooneyisms - Too good not to share!!

I've learned.... That the best classroom in the world is at the feet of an elderly person.
I've learned.... That when you're in love, it shows.
I've learned.... That just one person saying to me, 'You've made my day!' makes my day.
I've learned.... That having a child fall asleep in your arms is one of the most peaceful feelings in the world.
I've learned.... That being kind is more important than being right.
I've learned.... That you should never say no to a gift from a child.
I've learned.... That I can always pray for someone when I don't have the strength to help him in some other way.
I've learned.... That no matter how serious your life requires you to be, everyone needs a friend to act goofy with.
I've learned.... That sometimes all a person needs is a hand to hold and a heart to understand.
I've learned.... That simple walks with my father around the block on summer nights when I was a child did wonders for me as an adult.
I've learned.... That life is like a roll of toilet paper. The closer it gets to the end, the faster it goes.
I've learned.... That we should be glad God doesn't give us everything we ask for.
I've learned.... That money doesn't buy class.
I've learned.... That it's those small daily happenings that make life so spectacular.
I've learned.... That under everyone's hard shell is someone who wants to be appreciated and loved.
I've learned.... That to ignore the facts does not change the facts.
I've learned.... That when you plan to get even with someone, you are only letting that person continue to hurt you.
I've learned.... That love, not time, heals all wounds.
I've learned.... That the easiest way for me to grow as a person is to surround myself with people smarter than I am.
I've learned.... That everyone you meet deserves to be greeted with a smile..
I've learned.... That no one is perfect until you fall in love with them.
I've learned... That life is tough, but I'm tougher.
I've learned.... That opportunities are never lost; someone will take the ones you miss.
I've learned.... That when you harbor bitterness, happiness will dock elsewhere.
I've learned.... That I wish I could have told my Mom that I love her one more time before she passed away.
I've learned.... That one should keep his words both soft and tender, because tomorrow he may have to eat them.
I've learned..... That a smile is an inexpensive way to improve your looks.
I've learned..... That when your newly born grandchild holds your little finger in his little fist, that you're hooked for life.
I've learned.... That everyone wants to live on top of the mountain, but all the happiness and growth occurs while you're climbing it.
I've learned.... That the less time I have to work with, the more things I get done.



Eternal light



Christmas occurred when God invaded Earth in a strange and marvelous way. A special child was born to improbable parents in an unlikely place at an inconvenient time and in an unwelcoming world. Yet heaven's light pierced the darkness and shone through the life of that unique baby. That light was and is an eternal light. God's light in Christ is a saving light that can keep the world from total destruction, from the ultimate darkness. The message is always true: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5, NRSV). And it never will.

—Charles Ferrell



This article was written three years ago during 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic was spreading at an unbelievable rate throughout our country and around the world. Hence, it was called a pandemic (i.e. world-wide epidemic). We were also experiencing the most vitriolic presidential election in decades, if at all. As 2023 is waning and we are on the cusp of a brand new year in 2024, the Lord God has brought us through the Covid-19 pandemic, blessed us to develop new effective vaccines, boosters and antiviral medications. Nevertheless, this article is still relevant as we are approaching another presidential election year with an ever increasing divided body politic and two wars ensuing in different parts of the world, in Ukraine between Russian and the sovereign nation of Ukraine, and the Middle East between Israel and Hamas. I pray that it will give each one who reads it pause for thought and prayer this Advent Season and Christmas. May we never stop praying for peace on earth. And let it begin with each one of us. I pray that you all have a Blessed Advent Season!

This Christmas Holiday Season will be like no other in recent memory. The same could be said for much of 2020 altogether. The year has brought an unprecedented world-wide Covid-19 (aka novel Corona Virus) pandemic. At this writing, there are early good signs of possibly three promising vaccines; but no cure as of yet. At present, there are 12.4 million cases of Covid-19 in our nation. Approximately, 257,000 souls have been lost in the United States alone. World-wide, there are 59.1 million cases of Covid-19. World-wide, 1.4 million souls have been lost to the virus. Given these dire statistics, *unprecedented* has become an overused adjective to describe the phenomenon of the Covid-19 pandemic. As if this were not enough, 2020 brought an unprecedented presidential election season. Bi-partisanship seems to be a lost art and merely an empty notion. Our nation has been broken apart by a vitriolic and divisive political election season, the likes of which has never been seen in many of our lifetimes. On the precipice of what should be the most joyous time of the year; we are a broken and divided nation. We are in a Season of Lament. Loss of loved ones, loss of wages and jobs, loss of businesses, loss of education and learning for our children, and loss of empathy for our suffering brothers and sisters. Our collective grief and sorrow is palpable. On the precipice of what should be peace on earth and good will toward men, there does not seem to be much peace on earth and it is certainly difficult to find much good will toward humanity.

Despite all of this, there is hope. For, God is hope! During the Blessed Advent Season unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given the prophet Isaiah prophesied some 2,000 years ago. This child was and is no ordinary child! The Book of Isaiah tells us this about the Christ-child, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" ... (Is. 53:3). The prophet Isaiah also tells us the attributes and names this Christ-child shall grow up to possess and be called. He says, "and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6). I want to share an article titled "Peace on earth, good will toward men" by E. Kent Winward that appeared in the Ogden, Utah Standard Examiner on Dec. 25, 2016 and reprinted on Dec. 16, 2018. I pray that it will give you the Peace, Joy and Happiness of the Season in spite of what we are going through, I pray you will find Hope in the midst of the suffering and sorrow. Let there be peace on earth...and let it begin within each of our hearts! Merry Christmas!

May God's Shalom be with you all,

Rev. Dr. Melva J. Hayden, Pastor
Church of the Master

Peace on earth, good will toward men¹

I sat down to write this week and realized that Sunday (today) is Christmas. Do people read the newspaper on Christmas? I hope so. If you are reading this: Merry Christmas. I hope you and yours are having a joyous and peaceful holiday season.

I also realize there are certainly those today who are experiencing neither joy nor peace. For all the pleasures of the season, Christmas doesn't always bring happiness. For many, grief and other troubled feelings accompany the good cheer, or even occlude it.

I learned the disconnect between reality and "peace on earth" at a young age, not through any disillusionment or tragedy, but through my favorite Christmas Carol — "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." The carol is based on the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and usually excludes the two verses of the poem that specifically refer to the horrors of the Civil War.

The carol was born out of Longfellow's grief over his son's death in the Civil War, and it shows. The song is a mix of despair and hope that probably falls closer to most people's experience of the holidays once they've left childhood with its sugarplum fairies, sparkling lights, and mysterious elves. Much of the season seems to be a desperate attempt by adults to recapture the magic that has dissipated with experience, cynicism and loss.

My favorite stanza from the song is the bleakest:

*And in despair I bowed my head
There is no peace on earth, I said,
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men.*

For me, hate and death, mocking the sentiments of the angels feels the most real and visceral. The simple fact that there is no peace on earth is despairing. We aspire to peace in our lives. But our aspirations succumb in the daily grind of life. Working in the legal field, I am constantly reminded that peace is often difficult, if not impossible to obtain for many people.

When we speak of peace, we imagine passivity. If you feel peaceful, you don't imagine doing battle, but this is the irony of both human existence and the holiday season. Peace is the opposite of reality. Reality is that all must die and all must suffer. We cannot even live without killing, because our very lives at the most primal level survives by feeding on other forms of life. Peace is an idea we can only strive for and achieve intermittently.

¹ By E. KENT WINWARD, special to the Standard-Examiner- Dec 25, 2016 Updated Dec 16, 2018. (E. Kent Winward is an Ogden attorney).
Twitter: @KentWinward).

Of course, the law is one of our greatest tools for achieving peace. Over the centuries, laws have expanded to make us behave more peacefully towards each other. If you step over the legal line, peace is restored at the point of a gun. Violence controlled by the law is our best mechanism for maintaining peace.

When peace is lost and conflicts take over, the result is far from the peace we ask for at Christmas. Longfellow wrote:

*It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent
And made forlorn, The households born
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men.*

Angels may proclaim "peace on earth, goodwill to all," but peace comes through the sacrifice and efforts of real, living human beings. The United States patched its foundation with the blood of Longfellow's son and hundreds of thousands of others in the Civil War. The foundation fractured because the law allowed some humans to be counted as only 3/5ths a person. But despite generations of continued sacrifice, the old cracks still surface even today. Maybe this carol is resonating with me because after a brutal election year, we seem to have lost not just the idea of peace, but goodwill as well. I want to believe Longfellow's last stanza:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.*

I want to believe that the right and just will prevail, but my belief is tempered by the human suffering I see around me. I hope you are not suffering. I hope you are basking in the warmth of your homes and the love of your families. After the Amazon boxes have been broken down and placed in the recycling bin along with the wrapping paper, you can consign this newspaper to the same fate. Soon the year will end and even our time will recycle. I hope you can take the warmth and goodwill from your home today and let it emanate outwards into the community. We start with bringing peace to our corner of the world and let it expand from there.

Peace and goodwill can impact the world. Only through our efforts, our communities, our laws, and our actions can peace prevail. We want the bells' chime to signal the victory of peace. Victory may not come today, this Christmas. Perhaps when the earth completes its next revolution around the sun. Then, when the bells metaphorically ring out on Christmas day, we will all live in a world with less despair and more peace than the year before. This is my wish for you this holiday season.

Merry Christmas.

