

An Advent Message from Bishop Bower
4th Bishop Ordinary of the Anglican Diocese of the Eastern US
2024

Peace be with you!

Beloved, the days are growing shorter, and the nights are ever colder as we approach this time of year with a familiar sense of expectation. For some, it is a season filled with the preparation for Christmas, with all the shopping, decorating, and busyness that comes along with the hustle and bustle that starts at Thanksgiving and ends after Christmas.

It is easy to become anxious during this time of the year. Concerns over plans and preparations, worries over money, and of course, the fear that you will leave someone off the shopping list by accident. For many, it is a sad time of year, as they deeply miss departed loved ones. Others have given up on hope and just wait until the season passes so they can return to normal – whatever that means. All of these are symptoms of the worldly version of Advent, a season without Christ in the center.

Advent is from the Latin word *adventus*, which means coming or arrival. It should be a time for us to slow down in anticipation of the celebration of the incarnation of our Lord, and a time of reflection on His glorious second coming. But how do we refocus our soul to be oriented towards Christ?

Take extra time for prayer. For some, prayer comes naturally, while for others it must be a deliberate action. For those of us who are in the second category, we must train our prayer lives in the same way that we learn anything, through deliberate repetition. Choose a time in the day for your prayer, mornings and/or evenings usually work best, and set that time as a priority. This should include the reading of the daily offices known as Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. If the full prayer office is too long for you, the 1928 Book of Common Prayer has a section entitled “Family Prayer” starting on page 587. Perhaps you feel that is still too long, and here the Prayer Book offers an even shorter form on pages 592-593. These short forms of prayer take only moments, but you will spend time with the Lord.

Whenever you pray, do not forget to repent of your sins to God, to give Him thanks and praise for the many blessings in your life, and to ask for His divine assistance and guidance. Open your heart to Him and be quiet. Read the holy Scriptures and allow God to speak to you in this time. Yes, it takes intentionality, but the benefits of this time with God will amaze you.

Be a beacon of hope to others. Just as God gave His only begotten Son, that we might have hope, so too let us give that gift of hope to others. In a world filled with loneliness, pain, and despair, our message of hope is more needed than ever. Put your hope into action through acts of kindness and uplifting words. It has been said that “you may be the only Bible some

people will ever read”, while that is true, I would challenge you to push further to become Christlike. Or if you prefer, become Christians which comes from the diminutive Greek term which means “little Christ”. Be like Christ amid a troubled world.

Live with a higher purpose. So many of life’s anxieties are self-inflicted. We are so busy being concerned with ourselves, that we forget to place God in the center. Perhaps you have seen a petulant person or a spoiled child in a meltdown, could that be you at times? We can become so self-absorbed that there is no room for others or even God. But whenever we flip the script of our own behavior and place God first in all things, suddenly things change. We find a purpose outside of our human limitations and a reason to be and do things that are beyond our expectations and even our comprehension.

Advent is more than looking to the miracle of the incarnation when God took on our humanity so that we might participate in His divinity. It is also the season whenever we recall that He shall return to us. This is the fulfillment of God’s eternal plan for each of us. As we prepare through prayer, being a beacon of hope, and living a life through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, we discover another Advent blessing. Peace.

Perhaps more than at any time in human history we need peace. This is not something that the world can give us, it is a gift from God alone. Beloved, my hope for you is that you will accept Christ’s gift of forgiveness, renewal, and peace, this Advent.

And as always, keep both Christ and Mass in Christmas!

Dominus illuminatio mea,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'W' and 'B' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

The Right Reverend William Bower, SSC