

Trinity Times

A newsletter for the members and friends of Trinity Episcopal Church

Trinity Episcopal Church
The Episcopal Church in Athens since 1842
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Advent - Christmas - December, 2020

The Reign of Christ

Sermon Prepared for Sunday, November 22, 2020

The Rev. Benjamin Lee Lentz

Today is the Feast of the Reign of Christ, the last Sunday of Pentecost, the last Sunday of the Christian calendar. Next Sunday, the first Sunday of Advent, is the start of another Christian yearly cycle.

It's interesting to note that if we step back and use our peripheral vision, if you will, when looking at the scripture readings from All Saints Day through the Sundays of Advent, the readings generally have a similar theme. They revolve around my favorite word – eschatology. Eschatology means the things of the end times.

Something to remember is that the parameters of the Christian yearly cycle is not a birth to death to resurrection year. If that were the case, the year would start with December 25th and end sometime in March or April with Easter and the celebration of the resurrection.

Advent, the start of the year begins the year with an overflow from the last day of the previous year. Advent reminds us to look always – throughout the year – for the end things, the kingdom of God in its fullness, the reign of Christ.

So, today is the conclusion of the Christian year, the reign of Christ. And next Sunday immediately reminds us that we are to be looking toward the last day of the next year – the reign of Christ.

The secular world has perverted this vision of Advent, and the Church has allowed it to happen. Although in America Halloween is running a close second place, globally the culture of Christmas has eclipsed Advent.

Halloween ends and the next day the stores are filled with Christmas things: colored lights, trees, Santas, red & green decorations, wreathes, reindeer, angels,

manger scenes, Christmas gifts no one wants (but they're wrapped prettily so people will buy them).

On a secular level in America, Thanksgiving is relegated to a minor holiday. I suppose the day will come when Thanksgiving will be subsumed by Christmas completely: instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh, the wise men will present a roasted turkey and casserole dishes as a nod to Thanksgiving.

Against all this the Church has little defense. For all intents and purposes, then, what has become the global culture of Christmas effectively eclipses the season of Advent, precluding any engagement of its primary focus, namely, the manifestation of Christ's reign.

Yet before we shake our finger too vigorously at the secular world, there is a need to look squarely at the Church's complicity in the situation represented by the Christmas culture. By the time Advent begins, the pressure, even from practicing Christians, to sing Christmas hymns is overwhelming (Christmas music has "graced" store music for weeks already). Many congregations simply surrender to the Christmas culture and start singing carols as early as the First Sunday of Advent.

Additionally, an ecumenical glance at publishers' catalogues will reveal that much of the popular religious literature about Advent heralds it solely as a season of preparation for the Nativity. Certainly, Advent calendars, replete with chocolate treats, or for an "adult" Advent calendar, the liquor store has one with a different pint of wine for each day from December 1st through the 24th, are little more than a "count down" to Christmas.

So, by the beginning of December we are well on our way to Bethlehem. The problem with this, of course, is that the primary focus of Advent is the full manifestation of the Reign of Christ. This is the exclusive focus of the lectionary (Scripture readings) from the Sunday after All Saints' Day (November 1) until the

last week of Advent. Only in the last week do these readings, which form the thematic emphasis of the Church's weekly worship, begin to shift from a focus on eschatology to that of incarnation.



We need to remain focused on the fact that Christmas isn't our goal, it is merely a step in God's goal, which is today, the reign of Christ.

Today is the feast of the reign of Christ. It is the fulfillment of every Christian's desire – the time when Christ will reign supremely, unchallenged. Next Sunday, Advent 1, tells us to remember that we are to be preparing, not for Christmas, but for the reign of Christ.

Amen.

A message from Bishop Kevin

November 12, 2020

Beloved of the Diocese of Bethlehem,

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

In the last message I shared regarding pandemic protocols for churches, I expressed concerns about indoor gatherings in our parishes. Health experts predicted the possibility of an exponential rise in COVID cases in the colder months as people would meet more often indoors, an environment more likely to spread the virus than outdoors.

Sadly, that prediction has come to pass. Though Pennsylvania had consistently reported well under 1000 daily cases of COVID in the summer, in the past 3 days we have seen those numbers jump to over 4000 a day. And health experts expect that COVID cases will continue to rise over the next few months.

After consulting with health experts, diocesan leaders, and other bishops in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it has become clear that, in order to help ensure the health and safety of the people of the diocese, I must call upon you to suspend all indoor gatherings of our parishes effective November 22nd (or immediately, if you are able) until the end of Advent, December 20th.

This is difficult news, but please know that I intend to reevaluate in mid-December. If the situation improves, if health experts agree that cases and hospitalizations have dropped, and indoor gatherings pose a lower risk of spreading COVID, I assure you that we will update the protocols and consider re-gathering for Christmas. That said, it's very possible that we will need to make plans to hold our Christmas celebrations virtually, or outdoors with masks and physical distancing. Though this would pose significant sacrifices, I would encourage everyone to embrace this moment as an opportunity to discover new ways to worship God in the beauty and holiness of the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Know that as difficult as this decision is, that my first priority is the health and safety of all our parishioners. Know of my confidence in the resilience of the people of this diocese, and my trust in each and every one of you. And, above all, know "that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." -Romans 8:18

Be assured of my continued prayer and know of my love.

The Rt. Rev. Kevin D. Nichols
Bishop of Bethlehem



We are The Church: Outreach

Yes, our building is closed again, but we are still able to be The Church. Our outreach goes on as we donate items for the Carol Reed Memorial Mitten tree. You can drop off items on the rectory porch Sundays between 10 and 11. Our donations will go to children in need this winter.






Marie Bubniak has been our Outreach Coordinator for many years. She worked quietly gathering items to donate to the Abuse and Rape Crisis Center with the help of so many of you who put together baggies of personal items and helped organize the baskets for personal, bath or kitchen items. Last week we arranged for ARCC to pick up a large load of

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Trinity Episcopal Church - December 2020

Advent and Christmas

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Trinity Cycle of Prayer 12/6 Martha Pierce, Fanna Proper. 12/13 Carla Ross, Mary Smith 12/20 Roger and Mary Ann Smith. 12/27 John and Barbara Strange.		 Fill the Carol Reed Memorial Mitten Tree by dropping off items on the rectory porch, Sundays from 10-11 Through December 20. And socks, too!		The Diocese of Bethlehem - 12/6 Calvary, Tamaqua. 12/13 Christ Church, Towanda, The Rev. Maureen AtLee Hipple, Rector, Deacon Lawrence Holman 12/20 St. Anne's, Trexlertown, The Don Schaible. Education For Ministry. 12/27 Paul's, Troy, The Rev. Hazel B. Hunt.		The Diocese of Kajo Keji: 12/6 Emmanuel Kansuk Parish. 12/13 St. Philip Dibe Parish. 12/20 Emmanuel Parish Sokare. 12/27 Mangalotor Parish and Sodogo-Trinity Easton Primary School.
Anglicans around the world: 12/6 The Reformed Episcopal Church of Spain, Bishop Carlos López-Lozano. 12/13 The Falkland Islands, Bishop Timothy Thornton. 12/20 The mission agencies throughout the communion. 12/27 Pray for Christians in other denominations and the ecumenical movement.		1	2 AA 5:00 pm AA 7:30 pm	3 AA 5:30 pm AA 8:00 pm	4 <i>Marny Gerhart</i>	5
6 Advent II Trinity Closed 10 - Mitten Tree Drop Off, Rectory Porch 	7 AA 8:00 pm	8	9 AA 7:30 pm <i>Heather Hunsinger</i> <i>Mthr. Hazel Hunt</i> <i>Fr. Ben Lentz</i> <i>Ian Biovins</i>	10 AA 5:30 pm AA 8:00 pm	11	12
13 Advent III Trinity Closed 10 - Mitten Tree Drop Off Stewardship Sunday 	14 AA 8:00 pm <i>Nate</i>	15 <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">*Bishop Kevin will revisit his decision to close churches in mid-December.</div>	16 AA 7:30 pm <i>Dorotha West</i>	17 AA 5:30 pm AA 8:00 pm <i>David Bubniak</i>	18	19
20 Advent IV Trinity Closed* 10 Mitten Tree Drop Off Rectory Porch **Vestry meets** 	21 St. Thomas the Apostle AA 8:00 pm	22	23 AA 7:30 pm <i>Kay Horton Bennett --></i>	24 Christmas Eve 8 pm - Video Service Lessons and Music Details to follow AA 5:30 and 8 pm AA 8:00 pm	25 Christmas Day 	26 St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr
27 Christmas I Trinity Closed*	28 The Holy Innocents AA 8:00 pm	29	30 AA 7:30 pm	31 AA 5:30 pm AA 8:00 pm	The 179th Annual Meeting of the Members of Trinity Church, January 31, 2021. Plans at this time are to hold the meeting in the church, following worship. The Annual Report will be available the week before. <i>To seek and serve Christ in all persons</i>	

December at Trinity



Worship on Sundays in the church is currently suspended (See the message from Bishop Kevin on page 2). We may or may not resume services after December 20, when Bishop Kevin will revisit the closures. In the meantime:

The (Virtual) Carol Reed Memorial Mitten Tree is up. There is a bin on the rectory front porch where you can donate hats, gloves, mittens, scarves and socks. All items are donated to local schools. Drop them off on Sunday mornings between 10 and 11, now through December 20, the Fourth Sunday of Advent.

Stewardship Sunday - December 13. You'll receive a letter this week from the vestry asking you to prayerfully consider how you will share your time, treasure, and talents this coming year. The work of the church goes on whether we are able to meet in person or not.

Christmas Worship - If the Bishop does not find it safe for us to reopen, we plan to record and broadcast a service on Christmas Eve. It will be available on our Facebook page, and possibly on YouTube. When we are sure of the details, we'll get them to you. There will be music, readings, and a message from Fr. Ben.

Looking Ahead: Our 179th Annual Meeting is scheduled for January 31. We may have to get very creative with how we meet, but we'll manage.

Outreach - Cont'd from page 2

donations, for which they were extremely grateful. Marie's efforts included things a woman would need to set up her household again when she had been forced to leave everything behind for her and her children's safety. That includes small kitchen appliances, laundry supplies packed in a laundry basket, and more.

Donations are gathered in the parish hall kitchen.

We donate grocery items each Sunday when we are gathering for worship. This Fall, our offerings were given to the Sayre High School Student Pantry. Currently, donations are given to the Athens United Methodist Church. During this difficult time, many are hungry. Your generosity is much appreciated.

The Bridge of Penn-York Valley Churches is a joint Outreach organization which helps with rent, utilities, furniture and other emergency needs. Trinity is a member, but does not issue vouchers. The vestry voted to donate the remainder of our 2020 Outreach budget to The Bridge. In the past it has gone to our sister diocese in Africa for schools, but this year the need is right in our own neighborhoods.

So, keep saving your pennies for the Church Periodical Club, putting coins and folding money in your United Thank Offering blue box, and purchasing an extra item or two at the grocery store.

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Matthew 25:40b

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Advent - Christmas

December, 2020

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