

Trinity Times

A newsletter for the members and friends of Trinity Episcopal Church

Trinity Episcopal Church
The Episcopal Church in Athens since 1842
703 South Main Street (office at 701) Athens, PA 18810
The Rev. Benjamin Lee Lentz, Long-Term Supply Priest

Office: Voice and Fax: 570-888-5715
Parish Administrator, Barbara Cameron Caum: 570-888-8981
Web site: www.trinityathens.org - information@trinityathens.org
[Facebook.com/Trinity.Episcopal.Church.Athens](https://www.facebook.com/Trinity.Episcopal.Church.Athens)

Christmas - Epiphany - January, 2021

We produced our first video a few days before Christmas and emailed the link to many of you. The video is still up on Youtube, you can watch it if you click the link below. If you're reading this in paper form, you'll find a link to it from our website. For those of you without internet access, here is the text of Fr. Ben's Christmas sermon.

Christmas Eve Sermon **The Rev. Benjamin Lee Lentz** Cycle B; 24 December 2020

[\[Video: Trinity Church, Athens\]](#)

"... the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people ... Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'"

When the angelic chorus proclaimed those words it was a troublesome time in the lives of the shepherds and all of Israel. It was anything but the idyllic, pastoral scene we usually gaze upon.

The people were an occupied nation: Rome had been in charge for nearly six decades (they took control in 63 BCE). Rome had imposed taxes to help keep their control over the troublesome nation. Soldiers had the right to take what they needed to live on: including housing and food.

Herod the Great (perhaps a better name would be Herod the Terrible) was the puppet king of Israel - a tyrannical paranoid king, assassinating anyone whom he deemed a political threat (including temple priests, children, and a wife). Herod had imposed additional taxes to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem as a monument - more to himself than to God.

There were insurgents causing all sorts of trouble for Rome, the hierarchy, and as collateral damage, the Israelites themselves.

Life in 6 BCE (remember our calendar is off by 6 years), life in 6 BCE in a subjugated nation was anything but peaceful.

When Luke ultimately recalls the words and writes them down some 80-85 years after the fact, the civilized world he knew was going to hell in a hand basket as well. Persecutions under Caligula (37-41, you've got to remember him), Claudius (41-54), Nero, the fiddler (54-68) and a real nasty guy, Domitian (89-96) - if not open persecution, it was clearly an atmosphere of political distrust, disregard for human life, and the search for scapegoats (Jews & Christians made exceptionally good targets).

In the midst of all of this, Luke recalls the angelical chorus calling out: peace on earth - good will. The shepherds, instead of responding: what? have the angels been drinking too much of the eggnog from the Liquor Store? peace on earth - goodwill? Does God have a sick sense of humor sending out his messengers with such an announcement?

Instead of that sort of response, the shepherds take to the streets: checking out if it is true and sharing the hope and joy. They announce to their little portion of the world the in-breaking of the kingdom of God - a release of captivity from oppression. Granted, the shepherds were probably looking down the road a bit, when to when Jesus would become king, throw off the oppressors, like King David or Judas Maccabaeus. Little did they know, this was not what God had in mind, nor his angelic messengers - it was really about freedom from sin and death.

Still, they saw the possibilities and began to spread the good news!

So, here we are, some 2,020-odd years later. What's going on in our world?

Actually, life isn't so different. We may not be living as a politically oppressed people, but we are oppressed with fear: political unrest and distrust of our election process, war in Afghanistan, threat of foreign insurgents like Isis, Hamas, Al Qaeda; racial tension throughout the United States; and let's not forget, the pandemic?

How shall we hear these words of the “angelic chorus”?

More importantly, what do we do about them? I suppose we could write poems about Santa: ‘twas the night before Christmas (that was an Episcopal priest), or “yes Virginia”.

We could write a novel like Dickson’s “Christmas Carol” - a story of transformation through intimidation and fear, make movies like “miracle on 34th street”, or make made-for-TV programs so Hallmark can sell the Christmas spirit - and greeting cards.

Or do we do like the shepherds: simply, take it to the street?

If so, how do we take it to the streets? We check it out: go to the scriptures and see the story of salvation history (not just the Christmas story, but all that God has been doing leading up to the story); then we tell it to the world - maybe not the whole world, but at least , like the shepherds, our little part of the world. And we don’t necessarily have to express it verbally, but by living as redeemed people.

Ben Franklin, in the voice of Poor Richard, queried: “How many observe Christ’s Birth-day! How few, his Precepts! O! ‘tis easier to keep Holidays than Commandments.” (Poor Richard’s Almanack, 1743)

In the secular world Christmas is for kids - don’t get me wrongs, that’s a good thing - but God always - ALWAYS - has the big picture in mind.

God is not going to redeem just a small middle-eastern nation, but an entire world. He’s releasing all peoples from the captivity of sin, enabling us to work to bring about justice and peace - if only in the world immediately around us.

The words of the angelic chorus that Luke records two millennia ago are just important for us to hear and act upon as it was for the shepherds.

This Christmas, check it out, then take it to the streets.

May you have a very merry & fruitful Christmas and a most blessed New Year.

Amen.



[I began writing this column on January 6, probably the latest I’ve ever put off the newsletter in my 30 years of being your editor. Then, as you know, the news broke of the attack on the nation’s Capitol Building. I was shocked, frightened, dismayed, angry - and more, as I watched in disbelief. How could I write about justice, peace, and love? Now, over a week later, I appreciate even more that that’s exactly what I need to write about. -Editor]

Mission and Ministry - We are all Ministers

Maybe it’s been a while since you looked through the back of The Book of Common Prayer. In An Outline of the Faith - The Catechism - we are reminded that we are all ministers of the church and we are all to work for the Church’s mission: “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.”

“The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.”

This is a lofty and serious responsibility and as we enter the new year with our church building still closed due to the rampant spread of Covid-19 (our last service was November 8), we can’t pray and worship together, but we can still pray and worship. I’m no theologian, that’s for sure, but I have some ideas about how we can translate our Christian responsibility into our everyday lives:

The Baptismal Covenant asks, Will you:

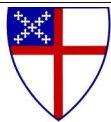
Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Some of us aren’t very good at sharing the Good News; we’re not Evangelists. But, we can share hope. So many of us are isolated during this dark Covid winter; we can give hope with a card or letter, email or phone call reminding people that they are loved and cared about and prayed for. That’s a small step we all can do.

Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Trinity’s mission statement says that we will Seek and serve Christ in all persons. This isn’t easy; some folks are just unlovable - it seems. So try looking at people a different way, as children of God, remembering that God loves all of his children. It helps. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks, which one acted as a neighbor? They answered, “the one who showed mercy.” The one who cared for the injured man, even though he was a stranger, an “other,” an outcast.

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Trinity Episcopal Church - January 2021

Christmas
Epiphany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	
<i>Trinity Cycle of Prayer: 1/3</i> Josie Thomas. Joe Barber. 1/10 Kathy, Alexandra, Jonathan Ayres. 1/17 Ralph, Rose, Bonnie, Jeffrey, Chris and Justin Bailey. 1/24 Don Barton. Barbara Bean. 1/31 Jan Beck. Marie Bubniak.		<i>Bethlehem: 1/3</i> St. Andrew's, Alden, The Rev. Charles Warwick. Clergy of the Diocese of Bethlehem. 1/10 Church of the Mediator, Allentown, The Rev. Canon Maria Tjeltveit, Rector. Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations 1/17 Grace Church, Allentown, The Rev. Twila Smith. Grace Montessori School. 1/26 St. Andrew's, Allentown/Bethlehem: The Rev. T. Scott Allen, Rector. Diocesan Council. 1/31 North Parish, St. Clair & Ashland.		1 Holy Name	2	The 8th Day of Christmas	The 9th Day of Christmas
3 Christmas II	4 AA 7:00 pm AA 8:00 pm <i>Marie Bubniak</i>	5	6 The Epiphany Intergroup 5:00 pm AA 7:30 pm 	7 AA 5:30 pm AA 8:00 pm	8	9	
The 10th Day of Christmas	The 11th Day of Christmas	The 12th Day of Christmas					
10 The First Sunday After the Epiphany	11 AA 7:00 pm AA 8:00 pm	12	13 AA 7:30 pm	14 AA 5:30 pm AA 8:00 pm	15	16 <i>Janet Gurney</i>	
17 Epiphany II	18 St. Peter AA 7:00 pm AA 8:00 pm	19	20 AA 7:30 pm	21 AA 5:30 pm AA 8:00 pm <i>Andrea Lentz</i>	22	23	
24 Epiphany III	25 St. Paul AA 7:00 pm AA 8:00 pm <i>Paul Kelley</i>	26	27 AA 7:30 pm	28 AA 5:30 pm AA 8:00 pm	29	30 <i>Joe Cama</i>	
31 Epiphany IV	Our annual meeting should be held on the 31st, but we may not be in church. We are working on finding a way to take care of our planning for 2021. Stay tuned.	<i>Anglicans Around the World: 1/3</i> The Episcopal/Anglican Province of Alexandria. 1/10 The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. 1/17 The Anglican Church of Australia. 1/26 The Church of Bangladesh. 1/31 Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil.		<i>Kajo Kaji: 1/3</i> Peace in Sudan and South Sudan. 1/10 Emmanuel Cathedral, Romigi. 1/17 St. Peter Tipere Parish. 1/24 St. John Kim and St. John Kendiri Parishes. 1/31 St. Paul Beliak Parish.		Souper Bowl of Caring is Sunday, February 7 	

January at Trinity

Worship on Sundays in the church is currently suspended. But you are still The Church, and you have done wonderful things lately.

The (Virtual) Carol Reed Memorial Mitten Tree was a huge success. The bins are overflowing with your donations. It's really quite amazing how much was donated - congratulations to you all!

Pledges for 2021. Many of you responded with either one-time gifts or pledges for 2021 and your gifts and promises will keep the church and her ministry going another year. However, we are still a bit short of our budget. It is not too late to send in a pledge. The vestry will be finalizing the budget on January 24.

Weekly envelopes - did arrive, but were left them at the church door the day it snowed 37 inches and they appeared as the snow melted. They were soaked through. So, we are awaiting a new order and will let you know when they arrive. In the meantime, please mail your donation to PO Box 9.

Our 179th Annual Meeting is currently on hold. It is the vestry's intention to have the yearly reports and proposed 2021 budget ready after their January 24th meeting. The report will be sent to you by email, or for those of you without email, available to pick up or mailed. Since we can't meet in person, some of our diocesan churches are meeting by Zoom and teleconference for those without Internet. The vestry, at this time, doesn't think that will work for Trinity. What do you think? Call or email the church office or a member of the vestry if you have a suggestion.

Mission and Ministry - Cont'd from page 2

Strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

In our current political crisis, justice, peace and love seem more elusive than ever, but crucially important. We can and should be good citizens and responsible voters, of course, but, on a more personal level, we can also think before we speak, considering carefully what we share. Does it lift up, or tear down? Is it shared in love or in anger?

As we strive to continue to be the Church, to live out our ministries and further the mission of the Church, we are not alone. We don't enter into the Baptismal Covenant depending on our own abilities. We answer all of these questions, "I will, with God's help."

We are never alone. We are part of the Body of Christ and all things are possible with God's help.

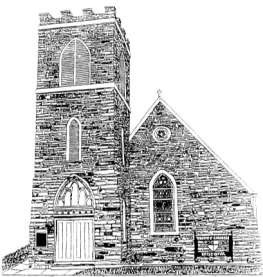
Each time we leave worship the last words we hear are:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

May those words of dismissal - peace and love - stay in your heart and guide your footsteps.

To learn more about the Church's ministry of Peace and Justice, visit The Episcopal Peace Fellowship web site: <https://epfnational.org/>

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