



ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

# The Messenger

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2025



# Advent and Christmas

St. Mark's Episcopal Church invites you to join us in celebrating the season of Advent and Christmas

## Advent Services and Events

### NOVEMBER 30 - ADVENT 1

Advent Wreath Making at 10:15 a.m. in Hauser Hall  
The Reading of the Gospel of Mark at 6 p.m. in the Church  
Jingle Bell Express final donation Sunday

### DECEMBER 7 - ADVENT 2

Blood Drive from 8 a.m. to noon in Reeder Gym  
San Pedro Book and Toy Drive

### DECEMBER 14 - ADVENT 3

Christmas Pageant at The Nine Fifteen  
Youth Group Christmas Party at 6 p.m. in the Youth Room  
San Pedro Book and Toy Drive

### DECEMBER 21 - ADVENT 4

Lessons and Carols at The Nine Fifteen  
Kids' Meals at 10:15 a.m. in Hauser Hall  
Lessons and Carols at The Five O'Clock with  
the St. Mark's Choir and Five O'Clock Band  
San Pedro Book and Toy Drive



## Christmas Eve & Christmas Day

### DECEMBER 24 - CHRISTMAS EVE

Festival Holy Eucharist, Rite II with the Nine Fifteen Band - 2 p.m.  
Festival Holy Eucharist with choir, Rite II - 4 p.m.  
Festival Holy Eucharist with choir and brass, Rite II - 6 p.m.  
Festival Holy Eucharist with choir and brass, Rite I - 8:30 p.m.

### DECEMBER 25 - CHRISTMAS DAY

Christmas Day Said Service, Rite II - 10 a.m.



# A Word From The Rector

by the Rev. Patrick J. Miller

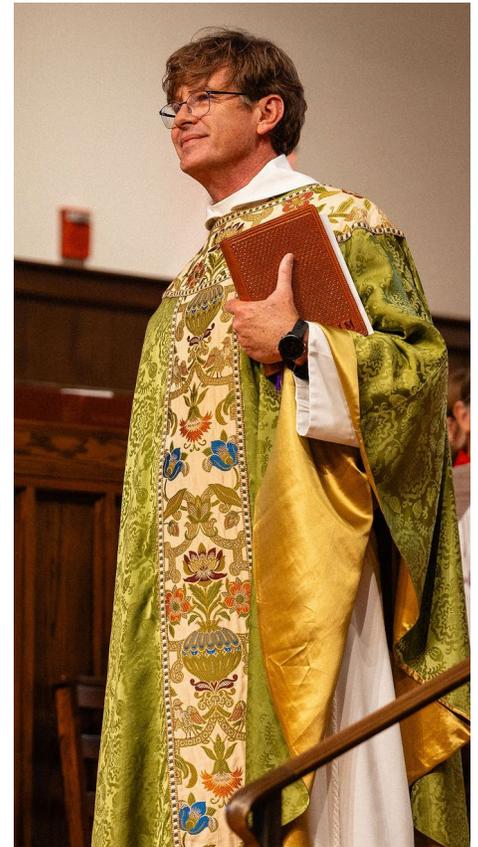
In my church office is an old Presbyterian church pulpit. On it are many gifts and mementoes that I have collected over my years as an ordained priest in parish ministry. These objects range from a clay St. Paul who is reacting to the blinding message of Jesus on the road to Damascus to a bible and prayer book from the 1800s, a leather-bound book of psalms, and a collection of crosses bearing icons--one being a mother of pearl cross from Jerusalem with the ten commandments written in Hebrew on the back. On the same pulpit are wood carvings. Among these is a thinking man from the Dominican Republic, a representation of the Trinity from Africa, and a wooden level with the name of my grandfather, JW Henshaw, carved into the surface. There is a glass bell, Scottish kilt clasps, and other odds and ends that serve as reminders of the people I have met and the ministries we did together.



In December of 2007, the Vestry called me to serve as the ninth Rector of St. Mark's. Allison, our young children, Henry and Catherine, and I arrived in the first weeks of 2008. Every day since, we have woken up to the work of St. Mark's and the mission to make

St. Mark's as strong as we could. Some days we got the work right. Other days we found we could have done better. But every day, for the last 18 years we have set our minds on the good we could do with the people of our parish and those in the community. After all that time, we feel that we have accomplished our mission. Nothing makes me prouder than the way so many people also woke up, went over to 3816 Bellaire Boulevard, and did the same thing--strove to make St. Mark's better.

In college, I studied to be an actor. I love live theater. It is a high wire act done right in front of people. In a play, everyone works in concert. From the lights, the sets, the actors, stagehands, musicians, everyone labors to make an emotional impression on the strangers sitting in the dark. A good play moves people, inspires them, causes them to think, to react. In some ways, it is possible for a play to change the lives of the people sitting in the seats watching. Later, when I felt the call to the priesthood, I realized the difference between a church service and a play is that in church, there is no acting. In church, everything is real. The goal is the same--to move people, inspire them, cause them to think, to react, and in some ways, change the lives of the people sitting in the pews participating. Instead of acting 'like' there is love, in a good church service there is real love on display. In church done well, those participating are there to make themselves better to serve the God of the universe. We do this work in the name of the Lord Jesus, inspired, we say, by a Holy Spirit. St. Mark's is a place where that happens each week, over four church services, in four



distinct ways. This work is done in the hope that the love found in the four Gospels and early letters, in old and sacred scriptures, is carried out of the house of God and into the world. We carry the voices of the past that cried out in the wilderness, "prepare the way" into the wilderness of our own day to do the same--cry out, "the Lord is here."

Advent is the beginning of the church year, and it is the time we set aside to remember our renewed efforts as the baptized. We remember the doom of humankind, and the darkness that accompanies our species. We remember the foolish and the absurd, the heroic and the strong. We remember the call of a young woman sitting at a well, and the honorable efforts of a man to stand by her side. We listen to music that takes us on a journey from the

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darkness of emperors to the excitement of shepherds, to a crowded inn, and finally, to a barn in the backyard. We tell the tale of mad kings and wise men with gifts to anoint a Messiah. Advent moves us from human darkness to divine light. Advent is done for the sake of remembering what it is we, the keepers of the story, are to do with our daily lives.

In each of our lives, embedded in our memories, is an old Presbyterian pulpit with the gifts and mementoes of our trust in the Lord. These gifts are the souvenirs of our lives lived up until now. In our memories are those psalms



we recited about lifting our eyes to the hills to find a help that comes from the Lord. In our memories are the times when we thought the food would run out, and it never did. In our memories are the impossible healings of our faith that made us better. Embedded in our memories are those moments we took our souls back from the darkness and set them into the light. In our memories are the myriads of times God revealed a betterment for us, and we took that bettered life and worked to make others better. All of this is real, not fantasy. On our pulpits are the memories of real people whose real lives were often dramatic or comedic,

but always filled with real tears and real laughter. Our real lives are filled with success and disappointment, but our real lives are always focused on the good that comes from a life with Jesus as our Lord.

As this new year of the church begins, a new life for the Millers and the people of St. Mark's also begins. The ninth rector and his family will begin a new chapter, as the people of St. Mark's also begin a new chapter with the tenth rector and his or her family. We each walk into this new moment with the reality of life, that we are each equipped with the same hope of Mary, Joseph, Peter, James, John, the Syrophoenician



woman, and those holy and healed ones who brought us the good news. This good news does not ever end but simply changes names and addresses. The good news is always growing, and so are those people who proclaim it. Each year is a new season, and this year is no different. In the Holy Spirit, we each are alive. And while addresses may change, the mission remains the same--proclaim in word and deed the goodness of the Lord.

At the end of each story is a hope. My hope is that the good work we each have done in our small part of Christendom will thrive in the future. My hope is

that we will take the lessons we learned from each other in our time together and set our sights on new horizons of divine call and holy service. My hope is that each day we live, we all wake up to the work of putting good news into the weary world. My hope is the same as those who came before me, that the light will shine in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. In my time as your rector, you, the people of St. Mark's, have done just that. So, my hope is not really a hope at all, it is simply reality.

Allison and I thank you for the opportunity to live among you, to raise our children, and to live into the



reality of our faith. No greater honor have I known, than to collect the gifts and mementoes of the love of God in a sacred place named St. Mark's. And with that, another new year in the church begins. We all take our places as the curtain rises on a new year of the truth of our Christian faith, our Christian life, and our Christian love. The world needs what we proclaim. So, we go. We run to see this thing the angels told us about, the birth of a savior for all the world to see and know. The reality of our proclamation continues once again, and it is wonderful to behold.

# Farewell Celebration

Sunday, December 28 | 11 a.m. | Hauser Hall

Following a combined 10 a.m. service, the parish of St. Mark's will hold a farewell celebration honoring the Rev. Patrick J. Miller and his 18 years as rector. Join us Sunday, December 28, at 11 a.m. in Hauser Hall as we thank Patrick, Allison, Henry, and Catherine for their ministry.

The 7:45 a.m. service will continue at its normal time. The Five O'Clock will be followed by a farewell celebration on the porch after the service.



## The Years in Pictures



# Advent's Invitation

by the Rev. Deacon Will Parker

Growing up with clergy parents, my two younger brothers and I caught on to the importance of the liturgical season of Advent. Driving around Amarillo in early December, we'd spot Christmas lights and cry out from the back seat, "Christmas?! It's still Advent!"

When I was in the fourth or fifth grade, my brothers and I started doing something we called "The Advent Rap" where we would speak or rap the lyrics to Advent hymns. I have a few memories of performing this for a church party and for our extended family one year at Thanksgiving. That Thanksgiving, my youngest brother, Caleb, really did not want to do it, but my grandmother's insistence won over. Looking back, his lack of enthusiasm is totally understandable. We were not good at rapping. That was the end of "The Advent Rap," but not our love for Advent.

Even as children, we picked up on our parents' quiet resistance to the speed and pressure of the season. In a consumerist society that often demands us to do more, to do it faster, and to do it all, Advent invites us to do less, move slower, and even practice doing nothing.

I am not advocating to forgo Christmas parties or presents. Christmas is my favorite holiday. I love the family time, gift-giving, and festive decorations. It's a delightful time of year for many—and an extraordinarily difficult time for others. Christmas often comes with grief, loneliness, and a feeling like you are supposed to unfailingly happen, when, in reality, you may be carrying

deep pain. For some people, including in our congregation, this is their first Christmas without their loved one—their spouse, mother, father, sibling, child, friend, or close relative.

In the grief of Christmas, there can also be healing. God became incarnate in Jesus, a vulnerable baby boy. God chose human frailty, suffering, betrayal, and pain. God chose us. Us humans—his beloved creatures. God is with us in our pain and grief—our agony.

Honoring pain. Making space for grief. These are sacred acts. Someone once said, "Grief is the ugliest form of love." To love is also to suffer because love inevitably leads to loss. The Christian Hope and Joy is the knowledge that death does not have the final say. We celebrate Christ being born at Christmas because God incarnating Godself heralds our salvation.

Jesus came into the world, living authentically as God among us, and by doing so in the oppressive occupying regime of the Roman Empire, the inevitable result of Jesus' ministry of love, reconciliation, challenging power, and casting out evil was a violent execution by the State.

But it was impossible for death to hold God. Jesus rose again on the third day, and he promises eternal life to all God's children.

Our loved ones who have died have only transitioned. Not passed away but passed over into the abundant love of God. You have not seen them for the last time. That's why we celebrate Christmas. It's a celebration of God's

eternal love for us. This love calls us to the crucial task of loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

So how might we live into Advent's invitation this year? How can we make space for silence, reflection, prayer, and acknowledging grief when things feel so rushed? It might look like waking up earlier to pray or sleeping in later to rest. It might look like practicing waiting without distraction. The other day at the post office, I stood in line without looking at my phone just to bring my awareness to the present moment. Neuroscientists tell us that letting our minds rest activates the "default network," the part of the brain that sparks creativity and insight. Allowing space in our brains also makes space for God in our hearts.

People often take something on or give something up for Lent—but Advent can be a time for that, too.

What could you take on that might help you feel more connected to God? A daily Advent reflection, time journaling or meditating, praying the Daily Office from the Book of Common Prayer?

What could you give up that's becoming an obstacle to feeling connected to God? Idolizing productivity, social media scrolling or endless news, resentment or jealousy. You may not be able to avoid the Christmas rush – that's

OK! Advent isn't about rejecting joy or avoiding all responsibilities. It's about cultivating peace, even in small ways.

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You might turn your phone to black and white to make it less enticing or say “no” to a few invitations. Take a day off, if you can, to rest without guilt or remember sending out a Christmas card is not a moral obligation. You may let go of trying to control others and redirect that energy to praying for them. Or maybe you need to ask for help and admit if you’ve taken on too much.

Find small moments to pray. It could be while driving, washing the dishes, or falling asleep. A simple prayer like, “Jesus, may I abide in your love,” can reorient the heart.

As we move through this season together, no matter what feelings come up for you, may you experience—even briefly—God’s peace which passes all understanding.

There will always be more to do. Relieve yourself of the pressure to have it all together. Ever having it all together is a myth. It’s impossible to do it all as finite humans, but God has already done the most important thing: choosing to be with us.

The Eternal chose finitude that the finite may become eternal.

*O come, O Bright and Morning Star,  
and bring us comfort from afar!  
Dispel the shadows of the night  
and turn our darkness into light.*

# Music of the Season

Advent music in the church reflects the anticipation of the coming of Christ. We ready our hearts and minds to the birth of our Lord Jesus. There is hope, joy, and peace in the songs of this beautiful season.

On **Advent I**, November 30, the St. Mark’s Choir will sing *Advent Message* by Martin How which uses text from the Gospel of Matthew. “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Come Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus come.”

St. Mark’s Choir will sing the beloved Advent anthem, *A Spotless Rose* by Herbert Howells, during the 11 a.m. service on **Advent II**, December 7, which features tenor soloist, Jorge Martinez. “A Spotless Rose is blowing, sprung from a tender root: Its bud unfolds in the dark midnight.”

Enjoy our annual Christmas Pageant on **Advent III**, December 14, at The Nine Fifteen service. It is always a treat to see the talented youth of our parish tell the story of the birth of our Savior. At the 11 a.m. service, the St. Mark’s Choir will sing Paul Manz’s anthem, *E’en So, Lord Jesus Quickly Come*. The song features the beautiful words of Revelation 22, “E’en so, Lord Jesus, quickly come, and night shall be no more; They need no light nor lamp nor sun, for Christ will be their All!”

On **Advent IV**, December 21, The Nine Fifteen service, led by The Nine Fifteen Band and The Five O’Clock service, led by The Five O’Clock Band and St. Mark’s Choir will present Lessons and Carols with Eucharist. The service of Lessons and Carols began in 1880 in Truro, England. Carols were generally secular during this time and sung outside of residential areas. The church responded to the popularity of these carols by utilizing the tunes and setting them with sacred texts. The bible readings or lessons tell the story of humanity’s original sin, the promise of the Messiah’s arrival, and the birth of Jesus. After each reading, a musical reflection or carol is sung. There are traditionally nine Lessons and Carols, but our services will present a bit fewer so to also include our weekly eucharist.

On **Christmas Eve**, the joy of Christ’s birth will be reflected in the liturgical music of each service. Our brand new 2 p.m. service will feature The Nine Fifteen Band led by Tom Lynch. The 4 p.m. service will have a more traditional flare, with organ and choir leading the Christmas carols beloved by all. The 6 and 8:30 p.m. services will include organ, full choir, and St. Mark’s Brass Quintet, led by Director of Music, Renee Rybolt. It will be such a delight to sing all together, “O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem; come, and behold him, born the king of angels.”



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# All. Together.

STEWARDSHIP 2026

*'Tis the season for giving!*

Make your 2026 stewardship pledge and help St. Mark's reach its goal as we ring in the new year *All. Together.* To make your pledge online, follow the QR code. For more information, visit us at [www.stmarks-houston.org/stewardship-2026](http://www.stmarks-houston.org/stewardship-2026).



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