



ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Messenger

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS
2024



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

DECEMBER 1 - ADVENT 1

Advent Wreath Making at 9:45 a.m. in Hauser Hall

Blood Drive from 8 a.m. to noon in Reeder Gym

The Reading of the Gospel of Luke in the church at 6:30 p.m.

DECEMBER 8 - ADVENT 2

DECEMBER 15 - ADVENT 3

Lessons and Carols at the 10:30 a.m. service

Kids' Meals at 6 p.m. in Hauser Hall

DECEMBER 20

Cookies and Carols at 6 p.m. in Hauser Hall

DECEMBER 22 - ADVENT 4

Christmas Pageant at the 9 a.m. service



Christmas Eve & Christmas Day

DECEMBER 24 - CHRISTMAS EVE

Family Eucharist, Rite II - 4 p.m.

Festival Eucharist with choir and brass, Rite II - 6 p.m.

Festival Eucharist with choir and brass, Rite I - 8:30 p.m.

DECEMBER 25 - CHRISTMAS DAY

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



Have you made your list and checked it twice?

- ☒ Make a Christmas flower dedication
- ☒ Make a year-end offering
- ☒ Turn in my 2025 Stewardship pledge
- ☒ Mail my letter to Santa

St. Mark's Choir

A Holiday Music Tradition by Renee Rybolt, Director of Music

St. Mark's Choir is excited to ring in the holidays with various Advent and Christmas events. On December 15, the choir will present Advent Lessons and Carols during the 10:30 a.m. service. They are particularly looking forward to singing the famous anthem, "This is the Record of John", by Orlando Gibbons. Additionally, for a third consecutive year, the St. Mark's Choir will lead a Christmas caroling event, Cookies and Carols, on Friday, December 20, at 6 p.m. alongside St. Mark's Brass Quintet and the Nine O'Clock Band. Come enjoy hot cocoa, sweet treats, and festive music to kick off the Christmas break! The St. Mark's Choir will also help musically bring the annual Christmas Pageant alive during the 9 a.m. service on December 22. And finally, the Christmas Eve services will be filled with your favorite Christmas carols sung by the choir at all three of our services that evening. Our 4 p.m. Family Eucharist service will be led by organ and choir and the festive brass ensemble will join for the 6 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. Festival Eucharist services. Please plan on joining us this Christmas season at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. We look forward to celebrating with you!



A Word From The Rector

Paolo Veronese was a painter in the Renaissance. Born in Verona in 1528, much of his work was painted on the walls of monasteries' common rooms. Some of his paintings are very large collages of human life with Christ at the center. Veronese's "The Wedding at Cana" is the one that captures my imagination. It is 22 ft by 32 ft big, with many things happening all at once. There is an octet of musicians, a stuffy steward, several dogs, people hanging off the roofs and columns, and one cat. In the middle of it all is Jesus, simply sitting, as all the noise of life swirls around him. I think about Paolo Veronese's painting amid the noise and swirl of the Holidays.



Paolo Veronese - The Wedding at Cana

I wonder about that first day of painting when Paolo Veronese looked at 704 ft of blank canvass. I wonder where he first set his pencil. I think about him on a ladder, or a chair, or a stool. How does he start? In my own life I have faced large projects, or decisions. I have often stood in front of something that I felt was too big and insurmountable. These moments were decisions I had made, or decisions that were made for me. Either way the work was mine to do. I think about the moment I was given Allison's hand as her husband, or my newborn children were placed in my arms. I think about the day I walked into seminary or came to be the rector of St. Mark's. Each of these moments were large tasks---where was I to even start? Would I have enough soul, self, or energy to accomplish the tasks set before me? The noise and swirl of doubt, excitement, possibility, and capacity filled me, still fills me, each time I am at those first moments in front of life's blank canvasses.

As we come to the end of a church year, with a new year approaching, I remain amazed at what we have accomplished as the people of St. Mark's. I think about tasks in 2024 that seemed too large, too much, or too beyond our capacity as a parish. I think about my self-doubt, my own inabilities and failures as a leader. Then I see the Christmas Pageant, its own living "Wedding Feast at Cana." The pageant, with the children, the parents, and the people of St. Mark's, all enjoying the music, the laughter, the hope, the realities, the desire to proclaim, and the will to persevere together as a parish. These attributes are the examples of hope that our church community offers the world in all that we do. All we are to do is to pick up a pencil, look at the future, and create a new miracle of art in the ministries we provide at St. Mark's.

The wedding in Cana that Jesus attended points to the basics of our faith and life. It shows us how miracles

occur through simplicity. I imagine the first thing Paolo Veronese drew with his pencil was the horizon line--the division of heaven and earth. Then I think he drew Jesus, the center piece of creation. From there, the noise and swirl of life simply arrive. All we are to do is keep our focus on the Christ, aware that the rest of the painting will take care of itself.

The Rev. Patrick J. Miller,
Rector

A Christmas Pageant Story



The Christmas season is a time that can bring on many emotions. Sitting quietly by the Christmas tree late at night while everything is “calm and bright” as you sip hot cocoa? That is a wonderful feeling. Should you find yourself sitting quietly in that exact same scenario only to remember that you have forgotten to get someone a gift and even the great elf that is Amazon Prime won’t be able to perform the Christmas miracle of getting it to you on time, well, that is a different feeling entirely. In short, yes, as we all have probably experienced, Christmas can bring on a wide range emotions. What does this have to do with St. Mark’s Christmas Pageant? Everything!

When my wife and I first arrived at St. Mark’s, we were immediately greeted with warmth, kindness, and a feeling of community we had been hoping for. If you, like us, are somewhat new to the church, it is likely you had a similar experience, though our journey here may have been slightly different. In the summer of 2022, I joined the St. Mark’s staff part-time as the music director for the 9 a.m. service. Although it took another year to officially go full-time as the director of communications, my heart had already made its decision. And while there are many wonderful events

throughout the year, it was experiencing the Pageant for the first time that made me realize what a special place this is.

The Christmas Pageant at St. Mark’s effortlessly captures the full scope of the season. There is chaos, confusion, and everyone is running late. Have you ever tried to get 40 children dressed as angels, shepherds, and barn animals somewhere on time? It is an experience. There is also contagious joy, laughter, and an overwhelming sense of community as parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, and cousins sit together in a full sanctuary looking on as the children perform. And in the midst of it all, the story is told of the baby Jesus being laid in a manger as shepherds and wise men come to worship him.

There is only one word that can describe what I felt the first time I saw the Pageant - Christmas. It is my parent’s small kitchen as the entire family of six squeezes in to do dishes while singing Let It Snow. It is a last-minute rush to the mall with my brothers from out of state for a present because ordering it online, though easier, just wouldn’t be as memorable. It is waking up early to have my father’s pumpkin pie for breakfast and talking to my mother about our trips

to my grandparents’ house up north. It is being surrounded by family and letting love and hopefulness replace the worries I carry. It is truly pure joy, the season encapsulated in a single Sunday morning service.

You may be thinking I am biased about how amazing it is because I work here. After all, it is quite literally my job to tell you about it. There is always a bit of skepticism around the holidays. I’ve even heard there are people who have stopped believing in Santa. So let me leave you with this - a simple invitation to come and see it for yourself. Please join us here at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church on Sunday, December 22, at the 9 a.m. service as the children of St. Mark’s perform our yearly Christmas Pageant. It will be a holiday event, that I can personally assure you, you will not want to miss.

Tom Lynch,
Director of Communications

Theology Corner

A Season of Christ's Coming by The Rev. David M. Goldberg, Associate Rector

Advent celebrates Christ's coming: in history, in sacrament, and at the end of time. Let us reflect on the theology of each of these.

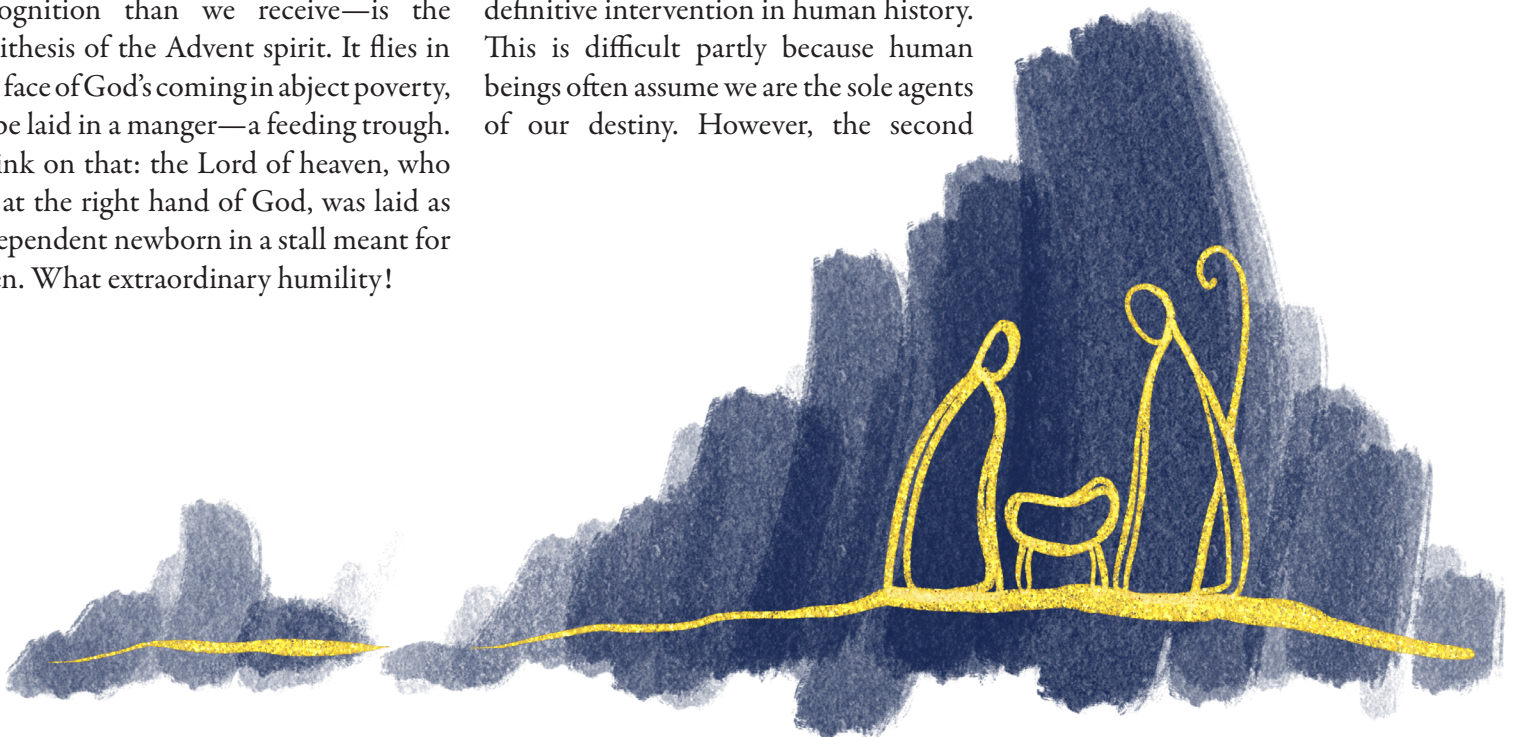
Christ's Coming in History: The first is the birth of Christ in Bethlehem of Judea. St. Paul describes this in his hymn from Philippians 2:6–7: “[Christ Jesus], who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” Here, Christ became flesh to show us the disposition necessary to receive him: humility. Jesus asks nothing of us that he did not embody himself. The Creator of the universe stooped down, suffered, and died to save us by teaching us the way to the Father. Pride—the belief that we can “go it alone,” that we always have the right answers, or that we deserve more recognition than we receive—is the antithesis of the Advent spirit. It flies in the face of God's coming in abject poverty, to be laid in a manger—a feeding trough. Think on that: the Lord of heaven, who sat at the right hand of God, was laid as a dependent newborn in a stall meant for oxen. What extraordinary humility!

Christ's Coming in Sacrament: At every Eucharist, we acclaim, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” God is truly present with us in the bread and wine. When we receive—not take—communion, we ask that God enter our hearts. Once again, to receive him is to open ourselves to his help and to recognize our need for him. Jesus says: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Mark 2:17). In the same way, we cannot receive this medicine for our souls if we are unwilling to admit our need for God's grace. Receiving the sacrament of Christ's body and blood is an act of humility, acknowledging our dependence on the Lord who sustains us.

Christ's Coming in Glory: Finally, Christ will come again in glory. This may be the hardest message of Advent to accept. It calls us to anticipate God's definitive intervention in human history. This is difficult partly because human beings often assume we are the sole agents of our destiny. However, the second

coming is not brought about by human ingenuity—neither by creating a utopia nor by engineering geopolitical events to trigger “end times.” The doctrine of the second coming reminds us to be humble: not only do we lack all the answers, but we do not even have the final word. That belongs to God alone.

If then we are to receive this season aright, let us pray for the humility to accept it. The first person to know the joy of Christ's coming was his Blessed Mother, not because she was proud of her righteousness, but because she was humble and pure of heart, open to the working of God's Holy Spirit in her. Her words must become our own: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Amen.



Why Do We: Open Presents Around A Christmas Tree?



Traditions are a funny thing. They mean so much to us, but often find their origins in random chance and silliness. My family has always had stockings with our first initial hung over a mantle. Of course, given that my parents are named Arnie and Sandra and I, the oldest child, am named Stephen, my mother would never hang the stockings from oldest to youngest. It became a tradition amongst my siblings to sneakily rearrange the stockings in a naughty manner I leave you, quite literally, to spell out for yourself.



But why do we have Christmas trees? Contrary to memes you might see bandied about this time of year, there isn't actually strong evidence connecting them to pagan practices. The modern practice is strongly tied to Lutheranism. The first verified record of a Christmas tree was erected December of 1539 in the Cathedral of Strausburg by Martin Bucer, but tradition says that Martin Luther himself was the first to chop down a tree, bring it indoors, and adorn it with lights to mirror the stars at night. Since then, the popularity of this tradition has waxed and waned. In 1647, for example, the Puritans in England's Parliament banned the celebration of Christmas for being unbiblical. The feast day was restored alongside the monarchy in the 1660s.

Similarly, it is most likely due to the monarchy that we decorate Christmas trees. While their presence became more and more accepted, most trees remained bare. This changed after 1846. Queen Victoria had decorated Christmas trees her whole life. After her marriage to Prince Albert, she became an object of fascination even here in the United States, similar to the Anglomania after William and Kate's wedding. That year, she and her family were sketched standing around a decorated Christmas tree opening gifts. Immediately, a trend started that continues to this day.

The history of gifts at Christmas is even more tangled. A major origin is of course the Biblical narrative of the magi giving gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus. Another part is the association of gift-givers St. Nicolas and the good King Wenceslas with the month of December, Nicolas's feast day being the 6th and Wenceslas's charity occurring on St. Stephen's Day, December 26. There is also some evidence that gift-giving was a consolation to discourage the practice of wassailing, when peasants would rowdily and often drunkenly demand that their liege lords give them handouts.

While all of these played a part, I personally think it goes deeper to our very human nature. In the Northern Hemisphere, the longest night of the year is just a few days before Christmas. It is in winter, a season known for harsh conditions that are not ideal for human survival. In fact, the only way to make it through the snow and cold is with each other. Gifts are our way of both thanking those who share their love with us and a sign of that unconditional love. This of course mirrors the ultimate Christmas gift, the birth of Jesus and the sign of God's unconditional love. So, this Christmas, I encourage you to lean into your traditions, whether silly or profound, new or old. They all point us to the hope that we share in God's great love for us.

Stephen Adkison,
Youth Minister



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St. Mark's vestry and staff thank you for
another incredible year of worshiping,
serving, and growing together in faith.

We wish you a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year!



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