

Vicar-General Rev. Michael Penfield: mapenfield@earthlink.net
 Editor: Susan Peterson: smprpp@sbcglobal.net

Christ Is The Light Of Christmas

Christmas joy and lights aglow;
 Christmas songs to warm and cheer
 Excitement is on the children's faces
 As anticipation fills the air —

But for some, it can be lonely
 When loved ones have passed away,
 Memories are all that linger
 As the years begin to fade

But Christ's light should never dim;
 It should ever shine out bright
 Our ray of hope in this troubled world
 Is our joy of eternal light

Christmas, when spent with Jesus,
 Can warm our hurting hearts,
 For as His light shines within us,
 Its glow warms our deepest parts.

© By M.S.Lowndes



The Vicar's Venue

Today is the first Sunday in Advent – a season I would venture to guess is one of the most misunderstood seasons in our society and in many of our churches. Many people see Advent as little more than the precursor to Christmas and certainly not a separate season, and can we blame them?

Starting in early October, Christmas decorations appear in the stores. On the day before, during, or after Thanksgiving, before the turkey has a chance to cool, Christmas lights and trees go up. And then the mad dash for presents – not receiving them but rather buying them. Black Friday is soon followed by Cyber Monday. Parties, celebrations, and get-togethers fill every moment of our weekend, not to mention the holiday obligations, baking, and card writing that fill every weeknight. From basically Thanksgiving until Christmas Day, there is not a moment of peace – which is quite ironic given that this is supposed to be the season of peace.

Then comes the inevitable let down. Christmas is never what Madison Avenue and the Hallmark Chanel tells us it should be. After Christmas





The Vicar's Venue (continued)

Day, the magic is gone. And then comes the mad dash to clean up. For many, on New Year's Day, the tree is neutered of all ornaments and tossed into the trash. All the lights come down, and not one vestige of Christmas is left in the house. But is this really what Advent is all about? Is it supposed to be this gluttony of parties, presents, and decorating, or is it supposed to be something else?

The truth is that Advent is a separate and unique season – a season unto itself. It is a period of preparation, but not the one our society wants us to think it is. It is not a period of preparing for the celebration of the anniversary of Jesus' birth alone. Rather, more importantly, it is a period of preparation for the Second Coming of Christ, when He will come in great glory to judge both the quick and the dead. It is a period of prayer, penance, and, in some faiths, fasting.

The idea of fasting during this period became the standard of the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox. The Roman Catholic Church would start the fast on the first day of December. The Nativity Fast of the Eastern Orthodox begins on the Feast of St. Martin – the 11th of November – which created the necessary forty days, just like Lent. However, the Roman Catholic Church abandoned the idea of a fast sometime in the 19th Century. And although the Eastern Orthodox still observe the period of fast, it is considered a “lesser fast” than the Great Lent fast.

The Roman Catholic Church determined that the liturgical color for Advent should be purple because of the penitential nature of Advent.

However, Anglicans have bucked this idea since about the 11th Century. They adopted “Sarum Blue” for Advent. This rich, dark blue color represents hope. Although penance is natural for people preparing for Christ's Second Coming, hope is a more important aspect of Advent. And the good people of England, accepting the penitential element, emphasized hope rather than the same type of penance that is typical of Lent.

This is all well and good, but what does it mean to us who are Anglicans? First, it does not mean adopting a period of fasting. If Anglicans traditionally concentrate on “hope” for Advent, then maybe that is where we ought to begin. Our sermons and our actions should emphasize hope. Hope should be the key that unlocks the lessons we read. And hope should be the theme of any event we may have during Advent.

Finally, there may be one more way, a much subtler way, of emphasizing hope. Although this may be too costly for many of our parishes, I would urge all of us to investigate purchasing Sarum blue appointments instead of the Roman Catholic purple when possible.

Toning down the craziness, which has become the norm in our secular society, is another thing our churches should do. We need to be true sanctuaries, and that means sanctuaries from the misinterpretation of liturgical seasons by Madison Avenue. Creating a peaceful oasis should be our goal all the time, but most especially during the “Christmas” season.

Finally, we need to educate our parishioners.



The Vicar's Venue (continued)

The song "The Twelve Days of Christmas," besides being interminable, speaks of 12 days. These twelve days are from Christmas Day (December 25) until the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6). These are the days that should be the period of celebration for Christmas. And all Christmas decorations and lights should stay up until after January 6th.

Since I have retired from my parish, I have had the blessing to be able to visit France and Austria during the Christmas season, and you know what I have discovered? They do not go crazy like Americans during this season. They DO enjoy themselves, but it is not a gluttony of gifts and partying. Christmas Trees do not usually go up until Christmas Eve, and what is more, vendors are still selling trees on Christmas Eve! Then people celebrate Christmas until the Feast of the Epiphany.

The Feast of the Epiphany culminates the celebrations, and usually involves some sort of confection. In Mexico, they bake a wreath-shaped sweet bread with a figurine of the baby Jesus baked into the bread. In France, it is an apple cake with a small figurine of a bird. Whoever finds the figurine is crowned King or Queen, and is charged with hosting the next year's Epiphany celebration, including buying the treat.

One last thought. A few years ago, I realized that it was impossible to invite my friends over to celebrate Christmas prior to Christmas Day, so I did it during the twelve days of Christmas. It was the best. The tree was a little worse for wear, being up since December 15th, but the celebration was relaxed, jovial, and quite enjoyable.

I would highly recommend it.

As Anglicans, we are to be witnesses to the world as to what it means to be a Christian. One of the ways to do this is by not giving into the pressures and craziness of our society. We should show what it means to live our faith, and that includes when and how we celebrate our faith. Let us adopt here and now our intention to break with the secular ways of celebrating Christmas, revive the proper observation of Advent, and celebrate Christmas during the proper season – the twelve days of Christmas. If we do this, we may be helping a lot of people to see Christ in Christmas, and the hope that is endemic to Advent.

May God grant you all a meaningful and holy Advent. Amen.

The Rev. Canon Michael Penfield, Vicar-General of the ACW





Parish News

The OT Prophets

(The second in a series of short articles intended to stimulate your interest in studying the writings of the prophets.)

What wonders are found in the Book of Isaiah. It is rich with visions of God's judgment on Judah for her sins (Chapters 1-39), promises of comfort and hope for the exiled (Chapters 40-59), and things to come in the final days (Chapters 60-66). It foretells the birth and earthly death of the Messiah as God's ultimate sacrifice for mankind.

In Isaiah we find the promise of God on Earth, eternal punishment of the wicked, and never ending joy for the redeemed of all nations in the presence of God in His Kingdom to come.

The Advent season is a particularly good time to open the book and reflect on some of the familiar passages concerning His coming.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God...The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." (Isaiah 40:1-5)

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD." (Isaiah 11: 1-10)

"Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14-16)

"...Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you..." (Isaiah 35:1-10)

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:2-7)

Not all Christians realize it was through a reading of Isaiah that Jesus first publicly confirmed who He was while in the synagogue in Nazareth.

And, there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord..."

And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4:17-21: Isaiah 61:1-2)

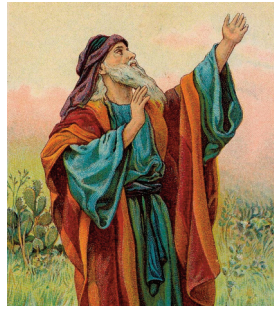
Note Jesus stopped reading midway through 61:1-2, which concludes, *"and the day of vengeance of our God..."*, for that had not yet come.

No study of the end-time *"vengeance of our God"* is complete without an in-depth study of Isaiah (Chapters 60-66) where God reveals much about what must yet happen, and reminds us of His never-ending covenant with the Jewish people: *For, behold, I will create a New Heaven and a New Earth: And the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind...(and) the redeemed shall walk there: They shall obtain joy and gladness... The sun shall no*





Prophets (continued)



more light your day; neither shall the moon give light to thee: But the Lord shall be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory.....the days of your mourning shall be ended. The people also shall all be righteous: They shall inherit the land forever...so shall your seed and name remain...(65:17-25)

Isaiah's visions of Jesus' common birth, cruel death, and glorious resurrection have played out in history, and substantiate the validity of Isaiah's prophecy and the consistency of Scripture.

David Cole, St John's Anglican Church, Boerne, TX

Bishop Mott's Retirement Celebration

At the same gathering, we had the pleasure to celebrate the retirement of our Bishop Winfield Mott. It is with both sadness and joy that we wish both Bishop Mott, and his wife Miki, a very happy and healthy retirement.



Installation of Reverend Penfield

On November 11, the Convocation of the West was honored to have Father Michael Penfield installed as its Vicar General. The installation service was conducted by the Rt. Rev. William Ilgenfritz. We are all thankful to have Father Penfield as our new Shepherd.





Words from Bishop Mott

In Conclusion, Thank You!

“To go down in history.” I now know what that phrase means. In 2001, I was ordained priest at the altar of St. Luke’s Church in Los Altos Hills (right next to now-Vicar-General Michael Penfield, to name drop). Fifteen years later, I officially retired at about 15 feet below that spot, in the parish basement, having gone down in history therefore at about a foot a year on average. Other things have gone down as well: my speed, physical strength, my desire to get on airplanes and my tolerance for church politics, including episcopal gatherings, to mention a few.

One thing is in great ascendancy, however. That is my gratitude to my brothers and sisters of the Diocese, now Convocation, of the West. Starting with the most recent; a big thank you for the retirement dinner, everything from the hosting of it by St. Luke’s folks, through the thoughtful (and delicious) catering, the grace-filled words spoken by bishop and vicar-general alike, and the gifts given, to the many who came very long distances to be a part of it. It is a drawback to such occasions, that I would have liked to have spent the evening with each person there, but of course had to make do with only a little time with any one person. I hope you will catch up with me at your leisure whenever you can.

Some of us go back together to the beginning of the 21st Century. It was an adventure in the days before ACNA to be an Anglican in America. We found ourselves, through no fault of our own, in a tiny group of tiny churches, which pretty much thought of itself as the One True Church all by itself. That was incongruous and

also completely lacking in resources, so we sought out Bishop Boyce and doubled the size of his Anglican Province of America diocese in 2003. We lived there happily ever after, until ACNA was organized. Most of us followed the lead of Bishop Boyce in joining into that formation, becoming part of the Reformed Episcopal Church to do so, since APA decided to stay away. And while ACNA is not a perfect vehicle, it has made us part of the Anglican world, and given Anglicanism in North America a profile in ways no “continuing” church could achieve.

My retirement this year brings us back to the present, as we transitioned into Convocation status in the Missionary Diocese of All Saints. And while Anglicans do not do well with change in general, and the discontinuing of our Diocese was painful, it has become obvious to me that we have landed in absolutely the right place by becoming part of MDAS. It gives us gifts we could never have had as a small struggling diocese. It makes us part of a community that is, in a word, home; a place which fulfills the journey to a catholic world view and ethic in an Anglican context, which has always been our goal.

As for me, I am writing my blog posts (thetrinitymission.org and click on the red box, in answer to the question I know you are asking). And I am thankful for the privilege given me of walking together with you on our pilgrimage as a community, and for your friendship, insights, support, dialog, forgiveness and mutual celebration these many years. You are in the hands of true under-shepherds with Bishop Bill and Canon Michael, so I need not fear for our future.





Words from Bishop Mott (continued)

“For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, he will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 7). Eucharist, Thanksgiving, is the process of life for a Christian, because we are being led on a road to true joy. Along the way, my thanksgiving is also for you, my brothers and sisters.



Hint of Humor



Prayer Requests

Pray for the families of those who lost their lives and those who have lost their homes in the fires in Tennessee.

Pray for the victims of the tornados that have been ravaging the southern states.

Pray for peace and unity in our country.

Pray for those being persecuted for their religious beliefs.

Pray for those confined to hospitals and nursing homes, and those caring for them.

Pray for the family of Bishop Royal Grote as they mourn the loss of their loved one.

Pray for the Bishops and leaders of Christ’s Church.

Parting Words

I would like to wish you and your families a very Blessed Christmas. May you find peace and hope in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

(Luke 2:10-11)

