

ADVENT 2020



Preparation Amid the Devastation

Advent 2020: Preparation Amid the Devastation

Friends in Christ,

None of you need to be reminded that 2020 has been a most unusual year. In our “neck of the woods” we’ve dealt with the global COVID 19 pandemic, direct hits by two major hurricanes, and all the other curveballs that “normal” life has thrown our way. And now, suddenly, it’s Advent!

Each year we observe the season of Advent as an opportunity to prepare for the coming of our Lord in a fresh and meaningful way. It seems that, while we’ve been mired in the realities of the coronavirus and the mass destruction here in Southwest Louisiana, the year has slipped past and now we’re standing at the door of Advent. More than ever, we need to be very intentional in our preparations. There are so many things that distract us. It is my prayer that these Advent devotions may be one part of your personal preparation for the coming of the baby Jesus into the world and the coming of our Lord Jesus into our lives anew this year.

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Bobbie Yellott, Pastor
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
1401 Argin Street
Sulphur, LA 70663

337-527-8439

firstchristiansulphur@yahoo.com

November 29, 2020

If you would like a digital copy of this devotional book (with color pictures), please email me at turtle_lady_8@yahoo.com and I’ll gladly send it to you.

Sunday, November 29, 2020

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God. (Isaiah 40:1)

In the days immediately following the cataclysmic landfall of Hurricane Laura in Southwest Louisiana on August 27, 2020, personal comfort was in short supply. No power meant no air conditioning, no hot water, no hot meals, no inside lights, no Internet (maybe that's not a comfort issue!) We couldn't do laundry or make a quick run to the grocery store.

The arrival of volunteer groups from around the country brought comfort and hope to the residents who were still in shock from the massive destruction. Within two days of the storm workers arrived to clear debris from yards, provide essential supplies for cleaning and everyday needs, and set up to provide massive numbers of hot meals. After days of cold sandwiches, a bowl of jambalaya is a real comfort food.

When the prophet Isaiah penned the words of the scripture above, the nation of Israel was in need of comforting words and deeds. They were still suffering in captivity in Babylon. Isaiah's message from God to the nation of Israel is "Encourage my people. In the middle of their discouragement, give them courage. Speak tenderly to them. Speak to their hearts. I want to deliver you." And God's message to us is the same: "Comfort my people. Strengthen my people. Encourage them. I'm for them, and I am coming to strengthen, to deliver, to enable you, for whatever it is you're facing."



Monday, November 30, 2020

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40:3)



Returning to our home on the afternoon that Hurricane Laura hit, we found it very difficult to navigate the roads between the city to which we had evacuated and the town in which we live. Trees, power poles and lines, and all sorts of other debris littered the highways. Several times we had to backtrack and seek another route because a road was completely blocked. When we finally reached Westlake, where we live, we were almost stymied. There is only one street into the neighborhood where we live, and it was totally impassable. Three or four huge trees lay across the street. We finally were able to circumvent the roadblock by driving through a neighbor's circular driveway and then across their yard.

Within a few days a couple residents took chain saws to the obstruction. Others joined in the effort, and eventually the street was cleared.

Isaiah foretold that the coming of the Son of God would be preceded by one who would prepare the way, who would “make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” This Advent, let us also prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

Tuesday, December 1, 2020

Every valley shall be exalted
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough places smooth. (Isaiah 40:4)



I'm sure you recognize the object in this picture. Throughout Southwest Louisiana are testaments to the 150+ miles per hour winds of Hurricane Laura. These iconic Golden Arches were bent into a crooked distortion of the original symbol. I imagine that at some point the sign will be repaired (or more likely replaced.) But for now they stand as a reminder of the power of the storm and of the power of the one whose coming we anticipate during Advent.

In ancient times there were, of course, no Interstate highways, no paved roads. When a ruler wanted to visit a distant part of his realm or move armies for military action, the route had to be prepared. There were often deep valleys and morasses, which had to be filled up; hills and mountains to be laid low; crooked paths and intricate roads amid woods and forests, to be straightened; and rough places, overgrown with thorns, thickets, and briars, and overspread with loose rocks and stumbling stones, which had to be smoothed and taken away.

What preparations are you making so that the pathway to your heart will be accessible to the coming Prince of Peace?

Wednesday, December 2, 2020

The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see *it* together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 40:5)



One of the most remarkable features of the yard of our church is the magnificent old oak trees that flank our prayer garden. In the days immediately following Hurricane Laura, church members wanted to know about the church building. Was it damaged? Did the roof hold? Was there water inside? But you could hear a collective sigh of relief when the word went out – the oaks are still standing. Those strong, glorious trees survived the storm that brought down so many thousands of trees in the region.

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed. We saw the glory of the Lord in the preservation of those revered trees. How much more shall we see the glory of the Lord when we prepare to welcome the Lord into our homes and hearts this Advent season.

Thursday, December 3, 2020

For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:6-7)



The whole landscape in Southwest Louisiana was shaken by Hurricane Laura. More than 750,000 acres of timber was destroyed, enough to build 28,000 houses. The loss to the timber industry is estimated at \$1.1 billion. The trees themselves appear to be weeping.

The Hebrew prophet Haggai wrote about B.C. 520 during the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (B.C. 520-516) after the Babylonian Exile. His goal was to encourage the builders by giving a word of hope. Perhaps the LORD is reminding the people of the time when He shook the world when He descended upon Mt. Sinai and gave the covenant to the people of Israel. But the biggest shakeup foretold by the prophet is the coming of the “treasure of all nations.” Are you excited about that treasure, the Lord of the nations and Savior of the world, whose coming we await during Advent?

Friday, December 4, 2020

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)



Like nearly everyone in the path of the two hurricanes, a rural family had many trees and branches down all over their property. While their home was practically unscathed, they had no access to their home. Multiple huge trees blocked their driveway. Several volunteer groups came to the area but were unable to help this family. Their home was an hour's drive from Sulphur and this remote location prevented workers from helping the family with this problem.

Finally, one group decided to focus all their energies on this situation. Bringing heavy equipment and a dozen workers, they cleared access to the driveway. But more than this, they brought a concrete message of love and encouragement.

This is exactly what the precursor to Jesus, the Messenger, John the Baptist, brought to the Jews, and brings to us. We can be encouraged; we are loved; prepare for the coming of the Lord.

Saturday, December 5, 2020

But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. (Malachi 3:2)



This house breaks my heart every time I pass it. It's on the main street of Westlake and fourteen weeks after Hurricane Laura it still looks like this. It wasn't much of a house to start with, an old shotgun house that needed a lot of tender loving care. But it couldn't stand up to the storm. It couldn't endure those brutal winds.

Malachi was God's final messenger to the disobedient and unfaithful nation of Israel before the prophetic voice of warning was silenced for four centuries. The repetitive call for Israel as a nation to repent of their sins and to turn back to God, had resounded down through the centuries, but the numerous warnings of many prophetic voices continued to go unheeded.

The prophecy has dark overtones – the Lord will come “like a refiner's fire.” But this verse, which combines both the First and Second Comings of the Lord, brings a promise of purifying and cleansing for those who trust in the coming One. Prepare your home and your heart for the One who has come and is to come again.

Sunday, December 6, 2020

He will come to judge like one who refines and purifies silver. As a metalworker refines silver and gold, so the LORD's messenger will purify the priests, so that they will bring to the LORD the right kind of offerings.
(Malachi 3:3)



Have you ever seen so much scrap metal? It used to be roofs and siding, carports and storage sheds. Now it's mangled metal heaped high on the sides of every road. Our own church lost its metal breezeway. For several weeks it sat in the front yard of the church until a volunteer group lugged it to the curb. While our breezeway isn't made of refined silver or gold, it was of value to us.

A "refiner's fire" is the process used to remove impurities from precious metals. Since the heat required to melt silver and gold is enough to destroy other materials, this is the method used to generate purer alloys. Here, that metaphor is being applied to the priesthood of Israel. As Christians today, we can only bemoan the spiritual condition in which we find ourselves and cry out to the Lord to purify our hearts in the refining fires of His holy righteousness. As we focus on the coming of the Christ child, may we seek the Lord's refining fire to purify our hearts and prepare a space for our Savior.

Monday, December 7, 2020

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)



The chorus of the 5 Man Electrical Band song “Signs” has the following sentiment:

Sign, sign, everywhere a sign
Blockin' out the scenery, breakin' my mind
Do this, don't do that, can't you read the sign?

A vast majority of billboards, street signs, and business signs in the path of the storms were damaged or destroyed. It is a strange experience to drive without the familiar landmarks we've used to guide us for years. And how do you give someone driving directions when the street signs are down? Even a GPS can't overcome this problem. We depend on signs.

A friend frequently bemoans that she just wants a sign from God, akin to Moses' burning bush. The prophet Isaiah promised a sign for the coming of the Messiah - the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son. Our season of Advent culminates with the birth of the promised one. Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus.

Tuesday, December 8, 2020

O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain;
O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength,
Lift *it* up, be not afraid;
Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” (Isaiah 40:9)



The first group of volunteers to come to our house two days after Hurricane Laura brought cases of water and chests full of ice. This thoughtful gift was precious to us and to the workers in the absence of air conditioning or even electric fans. The message of care delivered by those workers was indeed good tidings for us.

Traditionally we concentrate on four themes during Advent: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Other variations of the themes are Faithfulness, Hope, Joy, and Love; or Prophets, Angels, Shepherds, and Magi. It is not too much of a stretch that those still living in the hurricane reality might be caught up in the themes of Blue Tarps, Chain Saws, Generators, and Volunteers. Does this seem sacrilegious to you? In Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love; in Faithfulness, Hope, Joy, and Love; or in Prophets, Angels, Shepherds, and Magi we “Behold our God.” Know that in Blue Tarps, Chain Saws, Generators, and Volunteers we, beyond any shadow of a doubt “Behold our God.” The coming of the Christ changes everything. Get ready!

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Arise, shine; For your light has come!
And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. (Isaiah 60:1)



We evacuated the day before Hurricane Laura hit our area. We returned home the afternoon of the day Laura hit. Awaiting us were massive power outages. Laura took out 219 transmission lines, 1,108.17 miles of line and damaged 292 substations. The hurricane damaged 9,760 of the electric company's poles, 3,728 transformers and 18,706 spans of wire. We had bought battery-operated lanterns before the storm, but they illuminated only small areas. And outside at night, it was DARK! No streetlights.

Isaiah penned the joyful prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, "Arise, shine; for your light has come!" After weeks without power, we had a deep appreciation for the coming of the light. A lamp inside, a streetlight outside make a real difference in the quality of our lives. Now multiply that difference by at least a zillion and you get a tiny glimpse of the difference that the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World, has made and continues to make in the quality of all our lives.

And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you!

Thursday, December 10, 2020

For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you,
And His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60:2-3)



One of the unexpected consequences of the violent weather patterns that brought us Hurricane Laura and Hurricane Delta is an invasion of thousands of gnats. The tiny, flying pests are everywhere. Set your coffee cup on the counter. You'll have a couple floaters when you pick it back up. Cut up an apple. You'd better take a second look at those little black spots on the fruit. Those little critters are drawn to the light. So I turn on my reading lamp and here comes the horde.

Isaiah foretold that the Gentiles (that's us!) would come to the light, the Light of the World, the Promised One. Have you ever met someone with a charismatic personality? They seem to have a constant inner glow, and people are drawn to them like the gnats are drawn to my reading lamp. That's what the prophet said Jesus would be like. And our experience bears that out. We who know Jesus have been drawn to Him like the woman who just wanted to touch the hem of His garment. Once more this Advent we eagerly await His coming.

Friday, December 11, 2020

The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)



In the days immediately following the landfall of Hurricane Laura, the highways were clogged with caravans of utility trucks. Nearly 29,000 workers from 29 states and Canada came to Southwestern Louisiana working to help restore power. Traffic backed up all the way to Texas. And no one complained. We were so grateful for the outpouring of assistance.

Have you ever noticed that many things seem worse at night, in the dark? When our children were small, their illnesses always seemed more severe at night. Worries seem more serious. Consider the term “dark night of the soul,” referring to a spiritual crisis. Walking in darkness, living in darkness, either literally or figuratively, is a sorrowful condition.

The utility workers were eventually able to restore power to our area; our lights came back on after about three weeks. But much more momentous is the proclamation made by Jesus, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Saturday, December 12, 2020

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots. (Isaiah 11:1)



About a week after Hurricane Laura hit, my husband trimmed back our battered banana trees. Three hours later new shoots had already begun to sprout. What a parable of new life amid overwhelming destruction. A tree at our church was uprooted (one of many on our property to be damaged), and a volunteer chain saw gang cut it down to the stump. Stumps, actually, because the stump was split into three parts. I wondered if we could decorate the stumps appropriately for the seasons, but then I noticed – there was already new growth coming out of the remnants of the downed tree.

Isaiah 11 begins with the claim that new life will spring forth from an injured stump: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” Israel is just a field of burned out stumps on the landscape of world history. However, there is a stump with just a twig of life in it. It is the smallest of shoots, but from this barren, helpless shoot will come the redeemer of Israel.

Sunday, December 13, 2020

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation:
“One who trusts will not panic.” (Isaiah 28:16)



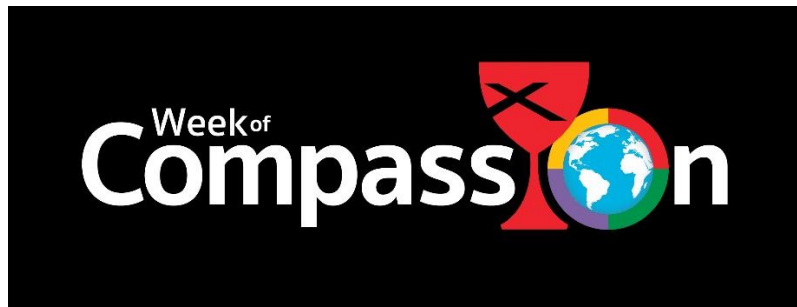
Some of the many heartbreaking sights scattered across Southwest Louisiana are the vacant lots where homes once sat. The buildings were so completely destroyed that what was left of them had to be torn down and pushed to the curb to be picked up by the big black trucks with the rest of the hurricane debris.

But look behind the debris piles. Almost hidden you can see the foundations of these one-time structures. One Internet site has this to say about foundations: “A proper foundation does more than just hold a house above ground. Building foundations also keep out moisture, insulate against the cold, and resist movement of the earth around it. Oh, and one more thing: It should last forever.”

So look at the foundation described by Isaiah. “...a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.” All of these superlatives, we know, describe the Messiah, the Christ, the one for whom we prepare this Advent time.

Monday, December 14, 2020

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news, who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” (Isaiah 52:7)



Perhaps I may be biased, but I believe that my daughter is a beautiful woman, inside and out. She was a cheerleader and was selected to represent her school in the parish fair pageant. She is a classically-trained ballerina, having danced for almost twenty years. A principal dancer for the Lake Charles Civic Ballet, she epitomized grace and beauty when she stepped onto the Marley (dance floor).

But my daughter has really ugly feet. Years of dancing in unforgiving toe shoes have taken their toll. She has calluses and bunions on both feet. So I think of my daughter when I read the Scripture from Isaiah, “How beautiful are the feet of the messenger who brings good news...”

Between the coronavirus and the hurricanes, many of us have been beaten down and battered. Imagine the infusion of hope and encouragement we experienced when Week of Compassion, the relief, refugee, and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), reached out to our church and its members with prayers and solidarity grants. How much more is our joy when we receive the good news of salvation, “Our God reigns.”

Tuesday, December 15, 2020

All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. (Luke 2:3-4)



The vast majority of the residents of Southwest Louisiana evacuated ahead of Hurricane Laura, heeding mandatory evacuation orders. The media advised heading west, toward Texas. Traffic slowed to a crawl and gridlock was common. The effect of a million and a half people evacuating simultaneously was just as would be expected. Our family evacuated to the east and experienced no slowdowns. Our trip took us to the home of our son, his wife, and our three grandchildren. It was a blessed time with loved ones.

In the days preceding the birth of the Christ child, my imagination conjures up the sight of bumper-to-bumper (alright, nose-to-tail) camels all converging on Bethlehem, the city of David. It was a hardship for people to travel distances in that time and region, and it was an additional aggravation to be required to pay taxes to the Romans (for that's what a census was at that time.) But at the end of the journey the travelers could look forward to a family reunion, visiting with family members they may not have seen for a long time. For many of us our hurricane evacuation may provide a glimpse of the travail and the joy of the trip taken by Joseph and Mary so long ago.

Wednesday, December 16, 2020

He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. (Luke 2:5-6)



This picture speaks of chaos to me. The roof is caving in and tarped. Trees litter the lot and the home. It is hard to think that anyone might live in this house after such damage. This picture speaks of chaos and pain.

Is there ever really a good time to have a baby? Let's start with the truth: There is no perfect time to have a baby. There will almost always be *something* that's out of sync with a woman's biological yearnings: her career, her age, her relationship (or lack thereof), her financial status, her tiny apartment – the list of potential barriers goes on. If you wait for the 'perfect' time you will never have children.

And then there's the actual childbirth process. Today's mothers-to-be have the options of many different types of anesthetics or painkillers to ease the discomfort. Even so, giving birth can be a painful process. Mary didn't have any of these aids. The onset of labor must have been somewhat chaotic for the parents-to-be. But beyond the chaos is the assurance of the promise: "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

Thursday, December 17, 2020

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)



The Inn on the Bayou was at one time one of the finest hotels in Lake Charles. Over the years it changed hands until it was finally destroyed in the recent hurricanes. There's no place for anyone in this inn now.

Nowadays families traveling might stay at a hotel, but not in Israel at the time of Jesus' birth. Back then, family stayed with family—especially pregnant family members.

In addition, the Greek word most Bibles render “inn” (*kataluma*) doesn't mean what we think in modern English. Tradition has obscured the true meaning here. Instead of “inn,” the word actually means “guest room.”

So, rather than being turned away from hotels, Joseph found his relatives' house filled with guests who were likely there for the census. The couple didn't face closed doors. They just had to live in the lower level of the house—a place that often housed animals in ancient Israel. Even so, it was in this humble setting that Jesus stepped into the world. During this season of preparation, consider what the birth of Jesus means to you.

Friday, December 18, 2020

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. (Luke 2:8)

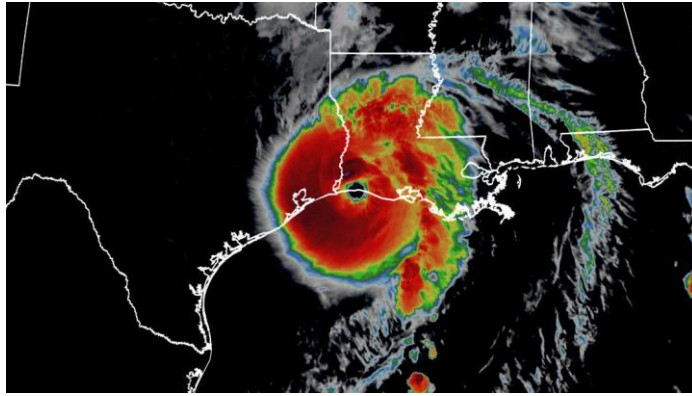


You don't see many flocks of sheep in Southwest Louisiana, but we certainly have herds of cattle. Like sheep, the cows need the guidance of a shepherd, cowherd (yes, that really is a word.) Hurricanes Laura and Delta brought widespread flooding and left very few fences standing. 595 cows were washed out to sea in the Gulf of Mexico. Most ranchers moved their herds to higher ground. Many had to sell their herds because they didn't have fences to contain them. In each instance the herders remain active, looking out for the best interests of their animals.

Like Louisiana cattlemen, the Bethlehem shepherds placed a high priority on the well-being of their flocks. Bethlehem's shepherds were known to care for the temple flock. These men may have also protected and cared for the lambs used in temple sacrifice. This flock of sheep most likely contained Passover lambs which were being tended for sacrifice about five months later. The shepherds themselves were probably quite young, possibly in their teens, as the tending of sheep was generally reserved for boys and young men. Shepherds were viewed as dishonorable outcasts in Israel. Their work not only made them ceremonially unclean, but their work also kept them away from the temple for weeks at a time so that they could not be purified. This verse shows that God uses the downtrodden and despised to accomplish his will. Consider this Advent who are the downtrodden and despised today? How is God using them?

Saturday, December 19, 2020

Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (Luke 2:9)



Every time I see this image in a news or weather report, my anxiety level ramps up about three notches. This has been a historic hurricane season. The Atlantic hurricane season runs from June 1 to November 30. But this year, two named storms (Arthur and Bertha) had already come and gone before June 1. On November 9, 2020 Subtropical Storm Theta formed in the Atlantic Ocean, making 2020 the most active hurricane season on record with 29 storms so far. As I write these words, there is a possible thirtieth storm (Iota) brewing in the Atlantic. And I will not be at all surprised if hurricanes continue to form during December.

I've now lived through direct hits by four major hurricanes and I have a healthy respect for (OK – fear of) them. So I've got a hint of how the shepherds must have felt when the angel of the Lord appeared to them following the birth of Jesus. They were terrified. After all, the glory of the Lord shone around them. Prepare your hearts – the glory of the Lord will shine around you.

Sunday, December 20, 2020

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11)



Beautiful roses are blooming, but in the background you can see one of the ever-present debris piles. The roses make me joyful, but the trash pile doesn't make me happy.

What does it mean to be joyful, to rejoice? Is it the same as happiness, as contentment, as satisfaction? I see happiness as transient, situational. When I broke my arm, I was not happy, or content, or satisfied. The situation did not engender happiness. I am happy when my children are home; I am sad to see them leave.

The angel did not foretell happiness. The angel spoke of joy. Joy transcends the situation. Even amid the massive destruction brought by the hurricanes, I can still be joyful. I remember a minister who said in one of his sermons, “Beauty is only skin deep, but ugly goes all the way through.” This is how I think it is with happiness and joy: Happiness is only skin deep, but joy goes all the way through. During Advent we prepare to receive the richest joy.

Monday, December 21, 2020

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (Luke 2:13-14)



Many people whose homes were rendered unlivable by the recent hurricanes are now living in campers, either bought or rented. I have a niece who lives with her husband and six children in a recreational vehicle while their home is being rebuilt. And they are glad to have it. In a Facebook post she wrote “As most of our belongings are ruined, we feel a strange peace with the situation we are facing, not only because we know that the things we lost really aren’t that important to us, but because all of our family and friends evacuated and are safe and we will rebuild. This is a time in our kids’ lives where they are finally seeing the good in the human race with all of our neighbors sharing what all they have to help one another. With all that is going wrong in the world today, at least we have this opportunity to teach our kids how to be caring and selfless, and show them what really matters in your life.”

God’s glory has been announced to this family in our time in much the same way that it was announced by the angels so long ago. During Advent, look for the angels around you as you prepare for the coming of the Lord. And we will know that peace announced by the heavenly choir.

Tuesday, December 22, 2020

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” (Luke 2:15)



Among the debris piles that line every street after the hurricanes, it is not unusual to see the entire contents of homes, soaked by rain and then ruined by mold. Sofas and chairs, mattresses, children’s toys, tables, desks. I even saw pianos by the curb at two different homes. The residents of these houses didn’t have much to come home to.

The shepherds at the time of Jesus’ birth didn’t have much to come home to, either. Shepherds were generally nomads, moving from place to place with their herds. They had few personal possessions. So why did the angels come to these lowly shepherds to announce the birth of the Messiah? Shepherds at the time were often looked upon as unclean and outside the law, sometimes even as dishonest, because they often grazed their flocks on other people’s lands. Even at His birth, then, Jesus was becoming associated with outcasts and sinners. Jesus “came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10) We can rejoice, then, that just as the lowly shepherds heard of Jesus and responded, so have we who are also lowly been given the same opportunity to know and respond to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Wednesday, December 23, 2020

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. (Luke 2:16)



A group called “Quilts and More” from St. Mark’s Lutheran Church in Springfield, Virginia heard about the devastating hurricanes which hit Southwest Louisiana and wanted to help. They offered to send handmade quilts for people who had lost everything in the storms. The ten beautiful quilts they sent were works of art and will bring not only comfort and warmth but also splashes of color and grace to their recipients.

Don’t you wish they could have provided an infant-sized quilt for the baby Jesus? A fanciful idea, I suppose. The manger in which the baby was laid was likely padded with straw, since the manger was actually the food trough for the animals that lived in the space where Jesus was born and straw would have been the animals’ food. Jesus was not laid in a manger by accident. It is a major spiritual symbol. Animals go to the manger for physical food, but with Jesus lying on the hay, we can go to the manger for spiritual food. Jesus has an infinite storehouse of nourishment available, and we can approach him any time and never go hungry.

When we give these donated quilts to the neediest of the hurricane victims we are, in a very real sense, providing a quilt for our Lord. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 25:40: ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Thursday, December 24, 2020

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:20)



The pictures above are before and after pictures of the same home. The right side of the home (as you face its front) was smashed by a huge tree. The owners stretched a big blue tarp over the destroyed side of the home, but this seemed to be an exercise in futility. How could a house with so much damage be salvaged? But look! That's exactly what is happening. That massive destruction is being rebuilt. What a symbol of hope!

Hope is one of the primary themes of Advent. We wait hopefully. Many children have high hopes of receiving most of the toys being advertised relentlessly on television during this season. Not unlike the children, we also approach the season with hope. Our hope, though, is rooted in our God and God's great gift of love that we know in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Hope in Jesus comes from more than just a belief that He was once a baby in a manger. This hope in Him has been called "an anchor for the soul." (Hebrews 6:19) It is something deep within that secures us through the storms of life.

Friday, December 25, 2020

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)



Isn't it ironic that one of the things we've been desiring during this most unusual Advent season is peace! This time of year is anything but peaceful to the typical American. We've got to decorate the house and yard, get the Christmas tree up and the Christmas cards out, bake and cook and entertain, shop and wrap and mail. For many people it's a hectic time of year. Add to this the chaos of hurricane recovery and the uncertainty of COVID-19.

But think back to how it all got started. "Silent night, holy night, all is **calm**, all is bright..." If everything else that we consider "essential" to the season were lost in the destruction of the storms and the isolation of the coronavirus, and all that was left was "...yon Virgin Mother and Child," we still would have gained everything. "Sleep in heavenly peace," sweet child of God. Our wait is over; we come prepared to receive God's own peace.

"Christ, the Savior, is born."