

Sermon

12.10.23

Advent 2 Year B

“Comfort, O comfort my people,”

says your God.

Good morning, St. Dunstan’s Family

Happy 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent.

We are busy getting ready. The tree looks beautiful! The nave is lovely. Blue vestments. Wow!

Every time I get ready to prepare a sermon, I consult our lectionary readings.

Here at St. Dunstan’s, we use the RCL or Revised Common Lectionary which includes an Old Testament Reading, a reading from the Psalms which is also called the Psalter, an Epistle reading and a Gospel Reading.

Every week when I begin to read through these scriptures, I feel like a child on Christmas morning as I unwrap each passage. Listening, **waiting** to hear what message God desires to be shared with his flock known as St. Dunstan’s. The very first verse in Isaiah 40 says,

“Comfort, O comfort my people,”

says your God.

What an incredible message to share. Especially during a hectic season of life.

I thoroughly enjoy all the accoutrements of this season. During the last few days, I have been doing a fair amount of travel. No matter where you go in our city, in our state, in our

country, this time of year people give themselves permission to be more expressive... I'm talking specifically of the yard art and light shows depicting a sundry of holiday themes and the new additions to the holiday themes brought on by pop culture.

Brightly colored lights, icicle lights, snowflake lights... snowflakes.... here in Houston, we are vaguely familiar with this specific concept... snow... something that comes down from the sky in white fluffy flakes.

Then there are the inflatables which appeared on the market in the last 5 years or so: Santas, Penguins, the Holy Family.

Beyond all the exterior of people's homes and business, this time of year I encourage us to "grant permission" for some internal self-expression or maybe another way to say that, introspection, self-reflection. It's important to keep an awareness of how you are feeling. Feelings are important. Along with feelings of joy and great anticipation there could be the capacity to experience some feelings of anxiety or some tension. I just want for you to be aware.

Today we light the second Advent candle, also known as the peace candle. Often it is called the "Bethlehem Candle." Bethlehem is situated within the hill country of Judah, part of a central mountain range that runs north & south. The area known as the Palestine, a part of Israel. Palestine is the ancient Roman name for the region. The origins of Judean Bethlehem are uncertain. Archaeological records indicate that it possibly existed as far back as the fourteenth century B.C.E. The city was probably established as an Israelite settlement during the time of Judges which would be sometime about 12th-11th centuries B.C.E. For comparison: Homer's ILLIAD and ODYSSEY epic adventures are the oldest surviving works of Greek literature. They were composed in the 8th century B.C.E.

The second Advent candle, the Bethlehem Candle, reminds us of Mary and Joseph's journey as they traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem before Mary gave birth to Jesus.

It was the ancestral home of King David. God made a covenant with David and a belief developed that a future, messianic king would be from the house of King David. So, Bethlehem came to be seen as the birthplace of the Messiah.

Why were Mary and Joseph traveling?

Rome was **the** dominate world power. Romans were very fond of various registrations for tax purposes. Into this corrupt, confusing time, in an obscure corner of the Roman empire, a nondescript couple comes to the backwater town of Bethlehem in obedience to a decree issued a world away.

Have you ever traveled much this time of year?

Pondering this, helps us relate more to understand the stress of the Holy Family. Some people are nervous travelers. Are we going to be on time? Are the roads crowded? Will there be a place to stay? We ask those questions. You know there had to be some tension in their relationship: she's nine months pregnant, leaving all things familiar, heading towards a distant village. The roads are now crowded since it was a direct law enforced by Rome. I'm not aware of any TSA precheck available or an EZ toll. Who knows what kind of dangers lurked from unwanted solicitors hawking undesired wares, preying upon weary travelers returning to ancestral lands to claim property or to register for taxation.

What an interesting junction this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent- where the Peace candle and the Bethlehem candle intersect. Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem at this time seems

anything but peaceful. That is the paradox of our faith story. This tension that exists. Jesus was born in the midst of great tension, yet he is the Prince of Peace.

Tension.

Anyone notice the slight amount of tension in the air this time of year?

Tension in the parking lot at Target and H E B.

There is the tension between who will control the remote between football bowl games and Christmas movies. Then there is the tension with the thermostat: one of us is freezing then the other one is burning up.

One definition of tension: a feeling of nervousness before an important event.

In Advent, there is a time of tension, a paradox of the season.

The time of tension rests between the already and the not yet.

Advent is a time of tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet.'

The 'already' is part of our **past**- already happened,

and our **present**- already as in the here and now.

The 'not yet' as in part of the future.

Advent refers to all the ways that Christ comes into our lives: past, present, and future.

From the Latin **Adventus**, the word, Advent means "coming."

The first Advent certainly focuses on the Incarnation, our Savior- Emmanuel, God with us.

While we anticipate the coming of Christ and Bethlehem, we also look forward to his second coming at the end of time.

From our Epistle reading, we hear in 2 Peter 3: 13-15

But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Advent reminds us that we are **simultaneously** anticipating 2 things:

1. Looking forward to the Incarnation, we experience a sense of great expectation as we must make ourselves ready for the appearance of the Lord among us – a crying, vulnerable baby, born in a smelly, noisy stable.

2. We anticipate the mysterious return of our jubilant King and triumphant Messiah,

The ‘already’ and the ‘not yet.’

We look to the Holy Family to offer us insights into our own lives. Waiting is difficult.

Even though there is tension in the waiting,

we can do the challenging interior work of inviting the Prince of Peace.