

“Advent Mashup”

I found this introduction to a First Sunday of Advent homily on Sermons that Work, an Episcopal site that includes homilies for every Sunday of the year. Bertie Pearson, Rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Georgetown, Texas, writes:

“Today we enter a transformational, even magical time of year: for this is... the weekend between Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and there are only 26 shopping days left until Christmas! It is time to spread sweetness and light among your loved ones by making all the right purchases. Deck the halls! Contemplate Rudolph! Be overwhelmed by the magic and joy of the season — at any cost!”

And I continue, lest we forget, that Giving Tuesday offers us the chance to assuage our guilt by sharing our treasure with whatever worthy cause meets our fancy. Everyone is looking for a piece of the consumer pie!

We often talk about consumerism in our Advent messages, about how Christmas has been hijacked by the secular world for profit. That none of this is the real “reason for the season”. And that’s true... it’s not to line the pockets of big box stores or online retailers or even non-profit NGO’s, that God became man and gave himself to us, the perfect offering for our sins.

For we, as Christians, Advent is traditionally a penitential season in the church year, sometimes called “Little Lent”. There are lots of themes that run throughout the Bible. One of the most prevalent is that God has created a beautiful world for us and rescued us from our travails and shortcomings time and time again. But we are a fallen people, sinners from the get-go.

We see it in our reading from Genesis this morning. Shortly after God created this amazing world, humankind was given a prominent place in it – to enjoy all its blessings and to walk closely with God. But we messed up so quickly. Temptation got the better of us. Sin. Submitting to Satan. But God didn’t take away our lives. He clothed us – and sadly sent us from the Garden.

But He still desires us... and is forever pleading with us to turn our hearts to him. We see it throughout the bible, in rescuing his people from Egypt, in the words of the prophets, in God’s promises to Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and Solomon. And down through time to Zechariah and Mary. He wants us back. He’ll do anything for us. That’s what we hear promised, again and again, in our readings and songs this morning!

I love when Advent rolls around each year. Away with this secular notion that the new year always begins on January 1st. I like the idea that the new year always begins on a Sunday. After all, that means that New Year’s Eve is always a Saturday night! Happy New Year!

As Christians, it makes sense for us to begin our new year on the Lord’s Day. The day He looked at his creation and said, “It is very good” and then rested. Doesn’t that seem like the perfect time to take stock of the old year, make our resolutions for the new year, prepare the way.

This year, I noticed that Advent is as early as it can start. We have a full four weeks until Christmas. Enjoy this extra time while you can. In 2023, Advent begins on December 3rd. Christmas Eve and the 4th Sunday of Advent will coincide and we'll only have three weeks to prepare. And this is another thing that Advent is all about... Preparing. Making our homes and ourselves ready to welcome and celebrate the coming precious gift of our Lord and Saviour.

Recall the hymn we sang this morning about preparing our house and hearth and table... "People Look East the time is near, of the crowning of the year." What exactly does that mean... the "crowning" of the year? In agricultural terms, it's the time when a plant begins to emerge from the ground. Or it can indicate that time when we see the top of a newborn baby's head emerging from the birth canal. It can mean recognition as the best, as in "a crowning achievement". The culmination of something.

Evil will be always be with us. The wilderness will always exist. But if we can but do our small part to further God's Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven, if together we humbly strive for justice and mercy in God's name, if we love and care for our neighbors, our neighbors next door and down the street, and our global neighbors... then the crowning of the year, the birth of our savior and redeemer, who endured our earthly existence so that God himself would better understand us, who taught us and will be crowned on the last day, will surely lead to our salvation and the salvation of the world.

As we heard Isaiah speak, "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. He will feed his flock like a shepherd: he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep." And from Baruch, "God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him."

In this Advent season we rejoice in the coming of our Lord. We strive to help lift up the valleys and make the hills low. To smooth the rough places. We refocus our lives on getting our spiritual houses in order. We prepare for the celebration of the redeeming power of God given as a gift, by grace, to us. We crown our Christmas trees with stars or angels, remembering the words of that Advent carol...

*Angels announce with shouts of mirth, Christ who brings new life to Earth.
Set every peak and valley humming with the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look East and sing today, Love the Lord is on the way.*

To which we respond, with Mary, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Thanks be to God!

Amen.

Morning Prayer Rubrics for Advent

Opening sentences:

Watch , for you know not when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning; lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

Mark 13:35, 36

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. *Isaiah 40:3*

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. *Isaiah 40:5*

The Invitatory and Psalter

All stand

Officiant Lord, open our lips.

People And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Officiant and People

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia.

Officiant: Our King and Savior now draws near: Come, let us adore him.

The Collects

For the Sick: Heavenly Father, giver of life and health: Comfort and relieve your sick servants, and give your power of healing to those who minister to their needs, that those (or *N.*, or *NN.*) for whom our prayers are offered may be strengthened in their weakness and have confidence in your loving care; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

For an End to Hate and Violence: We are asking the God of love and peace and reconciliation to change the hearts of those who, being overcome by sin, spread hate and carry out violence and viciousness around the world. *Amen*

For the Parish: Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For a Birthday: O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servants here at Good Shepherd as we begin another year. Grant that we may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen our trust in your goodness all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For Mission: O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*