

The Good News

St. Mary's Church, 260 Concord Street, Newton Lower Falls, MA 02462

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December 21, 2009

Ex Gratia

Hamlet 1,1

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And the, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.

—William Shakespeare

Christmas Eve Services

December 24 at 5:00 p.m.

At 5:00 p.m. there will be a special Christmas service with sermon, children's homily and Eucharist (Rite II). Guest instrumentalist Andrea Bonsignore will play carol arrangements for oboe, accompanied by the organ, for the prelude and postlude. St. Mary's choir members, tenor Glen Wright, soprano Anayis Mampre Wright and alto Lynn Edwards, will sing solos at the Offertory and Communion. The congregation will join in singing many familiar Christmas carols.

December 24 at 10:00 p.m.; prelude at 9:40 p.m.

At 10:00 p.m. there will be a formal Christmas Eve service with Sermon and Holy Eucharist (Rite II). It will begin with a festive musical prelude at 9:40 p.m. The Adult Choir will sing Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, arranged for mixed choir by Julius Harrison. This well-known work begins and ends with the plainsong chant *Hodie Christus natus est* (Today Christ is born) and includes settings of 14th and 15th century English poems about the birth of Christ. The choir will be accompanied by Deborah Fabiciewicz, harpist.

Please join us as we celebrate the birth of Christ at these festive services on Christmas Eve!

Blessing in your Advent journey,
The Reverend Ms. Margaret K. Schwarzer

Seek After Jesus

Editor: The following article is adapted from a sermon delivered on the first Sunday of Advent by The Reverend Schwarzer. It is based on the scripture reading, Luke 21:25-36.

If you have ventured outside since Thanksgiving Day, you will have been confronted with the happy, but very often secular trappings of our beloved Christmas. Stores, restaurants, and even towns and municipalities have wasted no time in getting out ribbon and stars, decorated trees and tinsel. The full blown jolliness of secular Christmas is already upon us and will not yield until December 27th, when all will shift towards the celebration of the New Year.

I like an enormous amount of this celebratory stuff, but coming out as early as it does, and being as relentlessly cheerful and giddy as it is, it misses most of the spiritual depth and nuanced complexity that we know in our Christian season of Advent and Christmastide. Advent, the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day, and Christmastide and the twelve days of Christmas which follow, are not about buying or acquiring. Neither are they about careless optimism or giddy ignorance. The secular world celebrates Santa Claus and the birth of a baby whom they don't pay much attention to during the rest of the year.

We do something very different. We wait for our Messiah, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, who always breaks every mold we try to put him into. We wait for the mystery who was loving enough to become one of us, brave enough to die to save us, and so divine that he broke time and death itself when he was resurrected.

Unlike secular Christmas, which suddenly arrives full blown, and continues in a kind of timeless jolliness for 30 days, our holy season has a marked progression of time and a focus on both the past history and the future promise of the Christian community. The season of Advent (a word which comes from the Latin word *Adventus* which means *coming*) is a season of the Christian church when we engage a period of expectation and waiting in preparation for the coming of Jesus. But during this time, we both remember the first appearance of Christ as Jesus of Nazareth in Bethlehem, and anticipate the second coming of Christ. As practicing Christians, we believe that the season of Advent serves a dual reminder of the original waiting that was done by the Hebrews and Gentiles for the birth of the Messiah and the waiting that we do today in anticipation of the second coming of Christ.

For this reason, Advent readings are sometimes full of the sweetness of the Magnificat, or the shepherds' experiences, and sometimes full of the imagined and apocalyptic end time, when Christ will come for the last time and both redeem and judge the world and its inhabitants. During Advent, we do celebrate St. Nicholas, who is known as Saint Nick or Santa, but we remember that he lived as a real person in the early years of the church and that he still acts as a saint of the church to bring love—and inspire gifts of love—in millions of people.

In other words, a true celebration of Advent is not for the faint-hearted or the terminally cute. There is serious work to be done and both solemn and gleeful joy to be found, but Christmas is not a trifling experience. Purple and blue, regal colors, are the color of our season, as we practice waiting for the Son of God to appear, as he once did before, and as he has promised to do again.

In Luke, Jesus said, “be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down...be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength...to stand.” This Advent reading comes from the darker and more apocalyptic strains of Christ's second coming. The Magnificat will come later, but right now, we are asked to stand in the world which is broken and waiting. Jesus speaks about nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves, and this past weekend we learned about a train derailing in Russia and a \$60 billion loss in Dubai which hit the stock market hard. Sadly, the nations are still confused by roaring of one sort or another.

What Jesus asks us to do is to be alert, not just to the brokenness, but to the grace which manages to thrive in the midst of it. Our invitation in this first week of Advent is to tune our vision to a bright promise in the midst of dark times. Where is God calling us? Where is God calling each of us, in the midst of the world's blight, or in the midst of our own struggle?

Unexpectedly, I was given my first chance to be alert to the promises of Advent this year when my husband and I took our son Ben to see *Astro Boy* this weekend. If you have seen it, you might have shared my experience of surprise at the unanticipated depth of the plot and characters. What I expected to find was a jolly and simple romp through the star-studded cosmic fantasy of a child; what I got was stirring and dark as well as energetic and fun.

Astro Boy turned out to be a robot who, like the Velveteen Rabbit, yearns to be real. He finds his humanity through a brutal rite of passage where he is forced to save either his own life or the lives of all the people whom he holds dear. By the time he is ready to make this agonizing choice, every member of the audience knows what selfless choice he will make, and he makes it, and pays the price. Grown-ups and children were crying as he lay motionless on the screen.

A few minutes later, children and grown-ups smiled quietly in the dark when another robot who was saved by *Astro Boy* earlier in the story shares some of his own internal energy and brings the hum and animation back into *Astro Boy's* eyes and limbs. We were watching a 2009 version of God's own story, where love, true to its own internal nature, sacrifices all in order to be true to itself.

The professional rating was PG-13, but the spiritual rating should have been much higher, something closer to the gospel of Luke. The animated version of resurrection, charming and redeeming, also unfolded in a broken cartoon world. with characters who were both kind and selfish. cruel. and hopeful. flourished. *Astro Boy* gave us more of a

mirror into our own lives than most of us in that theater had anticipated. Like the cast of characters in Luke's Gospel—Pilate and Paul, Peter and Judas Iscariot—almost all the characters in *Astro Boy* were selfish but kind, sometimes vicious and sometimes giddy. In the midst of a broken cartoon world, *Astro Boy* offered a child-sized version of the story that we, as a church, have never tired of telling. One who is not of our substance, but is very much like us, loves us enough to lose all and suffer death in order to bring real love and real hope into our very human lives. I had not expected to find Jesus in the Capitol Theater on Massachusetts Avenue on a Saturday afternoon, but there He was. I think most of us felt Him there.

I share this story not only because I am still puzzling it out for myself, but also because I believe that Advent is the season when we are each called to intentionally seek after Jesus and be especially open to the unexpected ways in which Jesus may be seeking after us.

On this day, I want to invite each of us, in the name of God, to be Magi or shepherds this Advent; seek after him in prayer or reading, or journeying, or, if you are too busy keeping your own sheep lined up, do promise to respond when he comes after you. He is likely to turn up in the least expected places, most particularly in imperfect places or imperfect hearts, or unexpected guises. He could be in a cartoon, or a friend's conversation; there is no way to anticipate Him. The one who was, and is to come, is also always in the here and now.

I found one last Advent invitation this weekend which is worthy to share with you. In the year 2000, St. Paul's cathedral in London sponsored a millennium hymn contest, and the winning hymn turned out to be an Advent hymn worthy of the Gospel of Luke. Four hundred entries from 12 countries were judged anonymously, and the winner spoke of Advent. Hilary Jolly wrote:

Through the darkness of the ages
Through the sorrow of the day
Strength of weary generations
Lifting hearts in hope and praise;
Light in darkness, joy in sorrow,
Presence to allay all fears;
Jesus you have kept your promise
Faithful through two thousand years.

Bounty of two thousand harvests,
Beauty of two thousand Springs,
He who made the time and seasons,
has vouch-safed us greater things.
Word of God who spoke creation,
Speaks forgiveness, speaks to save;
Gathers still His ransomed people
in the life He freely gave.

Countless flowers have bloomed and withered;
countless noons are sealed in night;
shattered thrones and fallen empires,
rags and riches lost from sight.
Christ your kingdom still increases
As the centuries unfold;
grain that fell to earth and perished
has brought forth ten-thousand fold.

Master we will sing your praises,
Man of sorrows, God of power,
For the measured march of seasons,
Shall at last bring in the hour

You return to lead us home;
You have promised, "I am coming."
Even so, Lord Jesus, come.

This Advent wisdom also has an Advent story; professional hymn writers and scholars made up the vast amount of contestants, but the winner, Hillary Jolly, was chiefly wise in her love of God and church. She is a sexton, a church cleaner, and lives in Cambridge, England. The best hymn was created in a modern day manger. Come, Lord Jesus, come. in a manger in Bethlehem, in a movie theater on Massachusetts Avenue, in the words and life of Hillary Jolly, in our lives. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen!

GIFT OF BAURY BIBLE

In this season of giving and receiving gifts, St. Mary's is proud to have received the priceless gift of a Bible belonging to our former rector, Dr. Alfred L. Baury (1829-1851). This Bible is inscribed from Madame Baury to her son in 1808. The family was probably living in Connecticut at that time. Considering that it is 200 years old, it is in excellent condition with leather cover and spine intact.

Anthony Winston, a direct descendant of Dr. Baury, contacted the church in November to see if we were interested in acquiring the Bible. Margaret and the Historians agreed that it would be a great addition to the tangible history of the church. The Bible arrived in December and is stored in the fireproof cabinet in the archives.

Mr. Winston visited the church a few years ago and at that time generously donated other items belonging to Dr. Baury. There will be a display of these items at the Annual Meeting

—Beverley Hurney

Annual Toy Drive for Rosie's Place

Rosie's Place relies on donations of new toys and gift cards for its guests to have Christmas presents for their children. For more information, contact Elisabeth Comer at 781-772-2220 or ewcomer@verizon.net.

Christmas Pageant

Despite the weather, a successful Christmas pageant was held on Sunday, December 20. The language of the story of "The Mystery of Christmas" was told using the words from *Godly Play*, an Episcopal Children's Curriculum written by Jerome Berryman. (An Adult Forum on *Godly Play* will be held in January.)

St. Mary's would like to thank the following children and youth for their participation in the Nativity Tableau or as narrators for this version of "The Mystery of Christmas": Cecilia Acuña, Diego Acuña, Lucy Acuña, Charlie Blank, Camille Bowman, Meredyth Bowman (Angel), Spencer Bowman (Wise Man), Andrew Clark, Phoebe Clark, Rowan de Peyster (Donkey), Toby de Peyster (Wise Man), Laura Dunn (Mary), Olivia Gilbert, John LaViolette (Emperor Augustus), Kate LaViolette, Jake Lawton (Wise Man), Julia Lawton (Angel), Annie Leonard (Lamb), Ford Leonard (Shepherd), May Leonard (Angel), Ben Levi (Shepherd), Katie Pyzowski (Sheep), Nick Pyzowski (Cow), Andrew Ramsey, Megan Schneider (Sheep), Fletcher Smyth (Cow), Amelia Tucker (Angel Gabriel), Catherine Williamson, Charlotte Williamson, Robert Williamson and Anayis Wright.

Particular thanks to our Junior Choir members who served in double roles: Charlie Blank, Rowan de Peyster, Toby de Peyster, John LaViolette, Kate LaViolette, Ford Leonard, Katie Pyzowski, Nick Pyzowski, Fletcher Smyth and Catherine Williamson.

St. Mary's is also grateful to Lucille Rossignol, Alicia Bowman, Whitney Pyzowski and Cecile Tucker for contributing many spectacular handmade costumes, and to Catherine Dunn and Jay Schneider for volunteering to donate snacks and beverages, as well as assisting with the pageant rehearsals.

Editor: Tim Green