

I Advent A December 2, 2007

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. AMEN.

A Season Of Joyful Expectation

How do you prepare for a major event? Some people are planners—they look ahead for weeks and create lists and timelines. Others like leaving things to a more spontaneous course of action and use the “wait and see” method of planning. I’ve done both—although in my years as a priest I’ve become much more inclined to plan ahead than to “wait and see”.

And the event itself more or less dictates how much planning will be involved. Weddings tend to take up a lot of planning energy—birthday parties and anniversaries seem to take up less of that energy and create much less angst. There’s a TV show called “*Bridezillas*” and it demonstrates the less than flattering attitudes of young women as they plan for their “perfect day”. Not a pretty picture!

If you’ve ever had to plan a wedding you might have an idea of what I’m talking about. But what about planning for the birth of a baby? How much planning does that require—and how far in advance do you begin to prepare? What does that require of us emotionally?

To the degree that the birth of a child is a long awaited event the planning is probably more engaging and imaginative. My former boss, the Bishop of the Diocese of New York tells the story of the couple who had been childless for years. They had a gorgeous mid-town Manhattan apartment—all in white from the carpet to the ceilings; it included a dramatic curving staircase of glass steps bound to a silver frame.

They were finally able to conceive and bear a child and they proceeded to prepare for the arrival with all the enthusiasm and energy they could muster. They put rubber corner protectors on the glass and marble coffee table, they put protective wood spacers between their glass steps,

they threw on blankets over their white leather sofas—not to protect the sofa, but so that the baby would not feel cold or slip off the slick material. In short they changed their whole lifestyle and turned their lives upside down to make sure the baby would be safe and comfortable. They took their preparations very seriously.

Well here we are at the beginning stages of planning the celebration of the birth of the Christ-child. It is the first Sunday of Advent. It is the beginning of the new liturgical year. The bad news is that we don't have nine months to prepare but the good news is that we know that's it's a boy and we know the due date is December 25<sup>th</sup>. We have four weeks to get ourselves ready to receive the light of the World into our hearts and homes. How will you prepare?

Will you reorient your life around the coming of the Christ-child? The Gospel says we don't know the hour of the coming of the Son of Man, yet in our understanding of the celebration of Christmas we know exactly when we're going to celebrate. Some of us are having people over, I know most of us are already shopping for gifts, food, and decorations—oh yes, we know exactly when the “Son of God” will arrive!

So how shall we understand what the Gospel is saying to us about the unexpected hour? To what is the Gospel referring—is it about the end of time—the second coming? I think it is. And while the language of end times is intriguing, and even titilating, can we find meaning in it for our day and time?

If you believe that we must change our lives and our lifestyles to protect our planet—then yes, this is a relevant passage. I've been with you a year now and if you recall in my first sermon to you I said that I wanted St. Paul's Episcopal Church to be the greenest church in Walnut Creek. My concern to make our church “green” is not about bragging rights—although I am very guilty of that because I brag about y'all all the time! But my real motivation is that our planet is in trouble and we are the stewards, the managers of the planet, so I want us to do the best job we can of protecting our earth. It is a charge that God has given us so how are we doing thus far?

We've made fabulous progress in our journey to "being green"; our paper cups are made from corn and are compostable, we recycle our electronic waste, we recycle our plastic, glass, tin, and paper waste.

We've encouraged folks to replace their light bulbs with CFL (compact fluorescent light) bulbs and we tried carpooling on earth day. Many of you are doing all of that and more in your own homes—I am realizing more and more about how I can learn from folks who've been doing this for decades.

But I am proudest of our biggest environmental project: our solar panels. I understand they are going to be installed very soon. When the panels are fully functioning our energy savings will equal taking thousands of cars off the road. We will eventually see our energy bills greatly reduced, but the impact on our environment will be immediate.

This is a great start, but there's more we can do. There are small changes like banning Styrofoam from being used at any of our church sponsored functions and I want us to begin to save our table scraps for composting. Other small but significant things are for everyone to use our green shopping bags instead of allowing the supermarket to bag our groceries in the plastic/paper sacks. We have them in our bookstore for a very low price.

I don't think Jesus had global warming in mind when he talked about the end of the world, but it fits with what is going on in our time period. Global warming unchecked will wreak havoc on our lives and change the face of the earth for hundreds and thousands of years. The future of humanity and all the rest of the planet's inhabitants are in jeopardy.

When I was growing up the threat of nuclear disaster was real. We are not quite out of the woods because we still have many countries who want to use the threat of nuclear bombs to get their way on the global political scene. But the very real threat to the planet is not from nuclear bombs but from our unwillingness to change our way of living.

How do we prepare for the coming of the Christ-child? Can we be as excited about this Christmas as the Manhattan couple was when they were expecting their

child? Are we willing to make the drastic changes that will keep our planet safe and protected?

Let's try balancing our traditional Christmas preparations with prayer, with a realization of the carbon imprint we make on the planet, and with joyful expectation that we can do better for the sake of our children and all future generations and for the sake of the planet. Maybe some day we won't need earth—maybe we'll use it up and move to another class M planet in the universe. But for now this earth is all we have.

God had made us the stewards of God's creation and has given us the intelligence with which to figure out the solution to our current situation. Shall we use our collective wisdom to be good stewards? Advent is a time of preparation and joyful expectation. We can't go back to business as usual—the time for preparation is now.

My year with you has been full of blessings and exciting challenges. Let's start our next year together with great hope that we will accomplish all that God would want for us. I have great faith in you and have great confidence that we will keep moving forward with love, energy and creative solutions to the challenges we face. AMEN.