



RECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Friends in Christ:

This year, Advent began on the earliest date possible – November 27, which also happened to be the Sunday after Thanksgiving. A November start date at the end of a holiday weekend is not the ideal time for the church's new year celebration, much less the start of a sacred season of watchful expectation. Advent is not a long season – only four Sundays – and so when one is lost to a national holiday, we are left with the daunting task of compressed preparation for the extraordinary act of God becoming flesh, an occasion which we will celebrate in the highest style possible (more on that below).

How can we prepare for Christmas during the season of Advent? The simplest and best way is by being in church. The framers of the Prayer Book lectionary (the three-year scripture cycle where our Sunday readings come from) went to great lengths to create special themes on Sunday mornings in Advent through pairings of prophecies from the book of Isaiah with passages from St. Matthew's gospel. The Isaiah readings focus on God's promise to send us a sign of his love, namely Jesus, or Immanuel, which means "God with us," and the extraordinary changes on earth which that event will bring about. The readings from Matthew focus on preparing for that event, sometimes using terms or images that are a bit disturbing (or at least attention-grabbing). The images from scripture are meant to be evocative and to get us to think about ways in which *we* can prepare for the greatest event history had ever known.

During my recent trip to the Holy Land, we spent a day in Bethlehem. While the posted descriptions of all churches and holy places there begin with, "On this site, it is believed that..." (in other words, we're not positive that the event memorialized by this structure actually happened here, but we have good reason to believe that it did), the countless prayers said by so many pilgrims visiting these places over the centuries did a lot for my own acceptance of the sites as holy. But one place near Bethlehem really struck me: the field where the shepherds were (believed to have been) watching their flocks, over which the midnight sky burst open and the heavenly host sang, "Glory be to God on high, and on earth, peace." This particular field did not look to me like a place that sheep would feed, or even sleep – it was on the side of a hill, and there were pine trees all around. But sitting down in the grass, even in the middle of the afternoon, I was struck by the peace and quiet of that place. The entire world seemed to come to a halt, and silence set in, which was interrupted only by the sound of wind rushing through the trees. There, in that place, I could imagine how jarring, how startling, how astonishing it would have been for that calm to be shattered by light, by sound, by movement –

by heaven breaking open and angels heralding the arrival of the Savior of the world.



And so another way to prepare for the coming of Christ is to make a point of spending some quiet time with God. Perhaps this time could be spent in silent prayer, but perhaps it could also be spent listening for what *God* might have to say to *you*. Communication is a two-way street: it's wonderful to talk to God, but we also must listen for his response – and Advent is an excellent time to do that.

In the weeks preceding Christmas, there will be a variety of occasions for worship and for fellowship here at St. John's. I invite you to read about those events in the pages that follow, and to be present here to enjoy them with your brothers and sisters in Christ during this holy season.

Yours faithfully,
(The Rev.) Christopher V. Pyles

CHRISTMAS EVE AND CHRISTMAS DAY SCHEDULE

At 7 p.m. on Christmas Eve, everyone is welcome to join us for a Christmas Pageant offered by the children of our Sunday School, followed by a simple celebration of the Eucharist.



At 10:30 p.m., music of the season will be offered, including selections from Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5* and Handel's *Messiah*, and featuring over a dozen guest instrumentalists and visiting choristers.

Midnight Mass will follow at 11 p.m., during which Haydn's *St. Nicholas Mass* will be offered. This Mass setting is exquisitely beautiful, with parts for horns, strings, oboes,

soloists, and full choir. We will welcome soprano soloist Blythe Walker – who sang with us last Christmas Eve – back to St. John’s for this service.

At 9 a.m. on Christmas Day (Sunday), there will be one Mass in the church without music.

GREAT BAZAAR, EVERYONE!

A large number of truly dedicated people helped make last month’s Holiday Bazaar a resounding and record-setting success. As of this writing, about \$3,700 was raised – a figure of which we can all be very proud. EVERYONE who worked hard preparing, sewing, creating, donating, cooking, eating, shopping and buying is deserving of our thanks. Great job!!

THE SHIPPENSBURG HOME TREE is now up in the back of the church. The Home is an assisted living facility located in Shippensburg, PA. Many of the 36 residents are financially challenged, so the home publishes a list of items needed for the residents’ care and to improve their quality of life. Our church has chosen to participate in this endeavor for many years by providing parishioners an opportunity to choose items from a gift tree in the back of the church on the two Sundays after Thanksgiving (this year Nov. 27 and Dec. 4). You may take a



gold ball off the tree with a gift tag which indicates a gift needed. Return the unwrapped gift and place it under the tree by Sunday, December 11. This will allow the gifts to be delivered before Christmas Day. Thank you for your generous donations in the past. Additionally, the residents love to have visitors and the Home welcomes people who will sponsor and/or lead an activity (game night –

bring prizes, simple refreshments), party, etc. If you are so inclined, call Mary Grace Shearer, Director of the Home, to schedule at 717-532-4612.

ROSE SUNDAY LUNCHEON

On Sunday, December 11, for the fifth year in a row, we are having a Rose Sunday Luncheon instead of coffee hour after the 10:00 service. While much time is spent with family and friends from outside the church in the weeks between Thanksgiving and New Years, an opportunity for fellowship with church family seems very appropriate. Generous donors are providing a catered lunch this year. There is a sign-up sheet on the table in the back; please sign up by December 6 to ensure an accurate count. All are welcome, and there is no charge.

PARISH HALL ENTRYWAY RENOVATION NOW COMPLETE

Just in time for the bishop’s visit, St. John’s secured the services of a new contractor, who completed the restoration/renovation of the entry area of our beloved Mary R. Beaver Fellowship Hall. The changes include new paint to

match the larger part of the hall, and adjusting the wainscoting on the rectory side of the pocket door wall to match the rest of the room. The storage cabinets were also painted. We hope to give the bathroom a minor face lift in the new year.

The contractor brought to our attention that the door to the hall is both splitting and rusting, and needs to be replaced. Knowing that a fully functional door will help retain heat during the cold months, we hope to have one purchased and installed sooner rather than later.

Please join us for coffee hour or the Rose Sunday luncheon and see for yourself how great the new look is!

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

At Bishop Scanlan’s visit on Christ the King Sunday, four persons were Confirmed, and one was Received. James McKelvey, who attends the 8:00, and Gwen Fetters, David Maxson, and Jonathan Preston, who attend the 10:00, were Confirmed, and Matt Perkins, who attends the 10:00, was Received.



These five people, plus two visitors from St. Andrew’s, State College, participated in a Sunday morning Confirmation class from September to November, and learned about Episcopal Church history, spirituality, theology, polity, worship, ministry and

mission. Please welcome them to our family of faith!

THANK YOU FROM THE CLAYTON FAMILY

Dear Church Family,

Thank you so much for the baby shower and gifts on November 13th. The car seat, double stroller, and gift cards were incredibly generous and greatly appreciated. These gifts are such a blessing for our family and it was quite a surprise event!



We feel so grateful to be a part of St. John's parish, and appreciate the outpouring of love that we have felt in the year and a half that we've been with you. We can't wait to introduce our little girl to everyone!

Sincerely,

Erik and Rebecca, Genavieve, Christopher, and Timothy Clayton

AN ADVENT PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day. We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us. We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom. We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence. We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To you we say, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen. – *Henri J. M. Nouwen*



December 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Breakfast Feeding Ministry, 7-9 a.m., parish hall	2 Community Lunch at the Presbyterian Church, 10:30 a.m.	3
4 Advent II MP 7:45 Mass 8 Sung Mass 10 Coffee Hour	5 7 p.m. Men's Group	6	7 Low Mass with healing in the Chapel, 9:30	8 Breakfast Feeding Ministry, 7-9 a.m., parish hall	9	10
11 Advent III Rose Sunday MP 7:45 Mass 8 Sung Mass 10 Catered Luncheon	12 7 p.m. Men's Group	13	14 Low Mass with healing in the Chapel, 9:30	15 Breakfast Feeding Ministry, 7-9 a.m., parish hall	16	17
18 Advent IV MP 7:45 Mass 8 Sung Mass 10 Coffee served in working sacristy Hanging Greens	19 7 p.m. Men's Group	20	21 Low Mass with healing in the Chapel, 9:30 7:30 –Vestry Meeting	22 Breakfast Feeding Ministry, 7-9 a.m., Parish Hall	23	24 Christmas Eve 7 pm-Family Svc 10:30 pm-Music of the Season 11pm-Solemn Mass
25 Christmas Day 9 am Mass No Coffee Hour	26 7 p.m. Men's Group	27	28 Morning Prayer 9:30	29 Breakfast Feeding Ministry, 7-9 a.m., Parish Hall	30	31

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

St. John's Altar Guild is receiving contributions to assist in decorating the church for Christmas. Please use this form for making your donations. All forms and donations should be returned to the parish office no later than **Monday, December 19**. Checks should be made payable to **St. John's Episcopal Church** and should be clearly marked **Christmas Decorations** on the memo line. More forms are on the table in the back of the church.



YOUR NAME:

(PLEASE PRINT)

IN MEMORY OF:

IN HONOR OF:

IN THANKSGIVING FOR:
