



The Shepherd's Voice

by Fr. Joe Rees

December 3, 2013

“The Kingdom of Heaven at Hand”

“Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”
Matthew 3: 1-2

John the Baptist preached an inspired message of repentance, ‘changing the way you think’, to the people who would come out to hear him in the wilderness. People came. They were inspired. Their lives changed. They turned to God. They were baptized. They heard of the Messiah to come. They knew that this was a pivotal time in the course of history to see God in action! “Make straight your paths!” “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance!” “Every person that doesn’t bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire!” Yes, this was the popular message of that day! Huge crowds turned out!

Today however, it is very difficult for us to warn the world’s people that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is surely and suddenly coming again. Anyone with this message is marginalized. As a clergy person strongly believing that Jesus is coming again, and perhaps very soon, I could also be dismissed and relegated to the “fundamentalist” wacko group. But my message is also as John’s, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” Obviously, he was rejected and became a thorn in the side of Herod, who eventually would put John in prison and behead him. John’s message had to be preached however. His prophecy was of the Messiah to come. When he saw Jesus, his cousin, coming over the

hill to join him at the Jordan River and then wade into the waters to be baptized; I’m sure he, John, could not believe what was happening. And when the Holy Spirit, the voice of God, spoke after Jesus was baptized, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him”, John is overwhelmed by the new and radical reality of God’s physical Presence on earth .

Perhaps at no other propitious moment of time, the Kingdom of Heaven appears to be at hand today. When He is coming, no one knows the exact day or time. Yet, when He comes again all people will see Him and it will be the culmination of His story, His creation. The Kingdom of Heaven is the Kingdom of God and it cannot be anything that is not of or by God. Therefore, there will be no more rebellion against God. No more sin. No more taking vile actions against our brothers and sisters. No more time to repent or be reconciled to a person who has harmed you or that you have harmed, either in word or deed. Now is the time to repent therefore, to change the way you think about someone, or of your actions, your decisions, your behaviors. It all needs to be God’s Way! Ask yourself the question, “Am I doing my life God’s Way?” Or am I only interested in doing it ‘my way’? I pray that we all ‘do life’ God’s Way! And the way of God is found in His Son, the Messiah who has indeed come into the world, who saved us from our sinful ways, and has given those who believe in Him eternal life with Him in heaven. To those believing in Him, He says, “Yours is the Kingdom of Heaven”!

Then if the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, how do we access it? It is within reach. This Advent, take your hands and reach for your Bible and open it to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Gospels. Read them. I especially love the Gospel of John, but all are great. Read about Jesus and His promises to you, like John 14-16. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."(14:2-3). This is a tremendous personal promise! It's our eternal life verse! We access the kingdom of heaven in believing this verse without any doubts. 'I believe Jesus that you will come for me and personally take me to my eternal home in heaven'. Can you say that with me? If you can, then you have the absolute assurance of heaven and it starts right now!

You can also access the kingdom of heaven right now in your prayers and worship of our King Jesus. Now is the time to get into church, and with all you have, worship Him who loves you so much that He died for you! If these were the last Sundays when the Church would gather on earth for our Lord Jesus to hear and know your worship of Him in the assembly of the faithful; you would want to give Him that worship so that He would know of your devotion to Him above all else, wouldn't you? You and I need to be ever atten-

tive and alert to the fact that He is coming again. The Kingdom of Heaven is coming at an hour we do not expect or know, but, woe to those who do not prepare with faithful hope for His coming. Now is the time...repent, and worship our King Jesus who is coming soon!

Next week I'll be at Canterbury Cathedral and worshipping at the mother church of Anglicanism. Advent Lessons & Carols, Evensong, Holy Eucharist, and even a Cathedral Choirs Christmas concert to make ready for Christ at Christmas. What a wonderful opportunity this is that you have given to Lucy and me to share in the worship of the Church that binds us together as the Body of Christ. Thank you all. I'll be back Dec. 18th, and preaching on the 22d and Christmas Eve. Make sure you attend church these next two Sundays as two great young preachers will be here at Grace: Fr. Brian Hughes from Holy Spirit in SD and Fr. Caleb Hummel from Holy Trinity, Ocean Beach. They are certain examples of future rectors in the Anglican Church and it bodes well for all of us. Please come and give them your support as they preach with awareness that 'the Kingdom of Heaven' is nearer than ever! Our beloved Fr. Richard will preside at Eucharist. A joyous Advent to all!

Love in Christ,
Fr. Joe

Sunday Servers

December 8, 2013	Advent 2		9:00 a.m. Service
First Reader	Isaiah 11:1-10		Randy Stewart
Psalm Reader	Psalm 72		Bill Laitinen
Second Reader	Romans 15:4-13	Second Sunday	Linnie Phelps
Intercessors		One Service	Mitch Dubski
Lay Euch. Ministers			Dick & Paula Sholly
Acolytes			Mitch D (C); Kalani C (T1); Kai C (T2)
Welcomers			Paula Sholly
Ushers			Ted Vallas, Jackie Lansing, Jim Livingston
Vestry Person of Day	Dick Sholly		
Healing Ministers			Alfred & Kay Focke
Announcer			Trish Stewart
Counters			Cline Handy & Michael Murphy

This Week at Grace

December 3, 2013-December 10, 2013

Tues. December 3

11:30 a.m. Rector's Bible Study
4:30 p.m. Healing prayer and Eucharist at CHC
7:00 p.m. Advent & Christmas Traditions from
Around the World.

Wed. December 4

8:30 a.m. Morning Prayer & Eucharist
Photos being taken in the Narthex
9:30 a.m. No Staff Meeting
Fr. Joe leaves for trip to Germany & England

Thurs. December 5

7:00 a.m. Bible Study
Photos being taken in the Narthex
11:30 a.m. Holy Communion—CHC
7:00 p.m. Choir Practice

Fri. December 6

10:00 a.m. Morning Prayer at CHC
Photos being taken in the Narthex
6:30 p.m. Evening Prayer & Healing

Sat. December 7

8:00 a.m. Men's Fellowship
8:30 a.m., Bishop Search Committee meeting
Photos being taken in the Narthex
10:00 p.m. Praise Team rehearsal

Sun. December 8

2nd Sunday of Advent

7:30 a.m. Spoken Eucharist Service
9:00 a.m. Combined Service
9:00 a.m. Children's Church
10:45 a.m. Food & Fellowship I
11:15 a.m. Vestry Meeting

Mon. December 9

6:30 a.m. Men's Prayer

Tues. December 10

11:30 a.m. Rector's Bible Study
4:30 p.m. Healing prayer and Eucharist at CHC
6:30 p.m.- Potluck Dinner and
Traditions of Advent & Christmas
around the world

Bible Readings this Week

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalms 72

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

We are using the English Standard Version of the Bible and the Lectionary from the Book of Common Prayer (Year A)

Upcoming Events

Dec. 3 Traditions of Advent & potluck
Dec. 4, 5, 6 & 7-Pictures taken for new directory.
Dec. 10 Traditions of Advent & potluck
Dec. 15 Angel Tree Party—2:00pm
Dec. 17 Traditions of Advent & Potluck
Dec. 22 Children's Christmas program & Party
Dec. 24 Christmas Eve services—5 & 10 pm
Dec. 25 Christmas Day service—10:00am
Dec. 25-Jan 2—Office closed. The staff will check messages and emails if you need to contact the church.

Angel Tree Ministry

We will have a party for the children as they come to pick up their gifts on December 15th. Your financial help with the party is needed. See Tina Murphy for more information.

Traditions of Advent Around the World

Join with the John & Myrna Lipnicke, Dick & Paula Sholly and Dick & Linnie Phelps as they share their experiences of Advent and Christmas in other countries on December 3rd and December 10th.

Donna Brayton will share her beautiful story of Christmas in England on December 17th. Potluck dinner will be at 6:30 p.m. and there will be a special Advent dish to represent the country being presented by the team. Bring a dish to share and join them in this special time of the beauty of the season in other parts of the world.

Grace Anglican Church

760-730-9900

www.graceanglicanchurch.com