

Advent1C_112915_mcr
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of *God*, who was and who is and who is to come. Amen.

Good morning, and Happy New Year! Today is the first day of a new liturgical year and the beginning of its first season - Advent.

You have probably noticed that, outside this building, the Christmas season is in full swing. Christmas music is on the radio 24/7; commercials full of snowy backgrounds beckon us to buy all the things we've been dreaming of; Christmas tree lots have sprung up on nearby corners, and as you drive down the streets in your neighborhood, you have probably seen decorations starting to appear in windows and on lawns. You even might have put up your own decorations over this holiday weekend.

In here, in this place, we are ready to get a new season under way as well, so some things are different that will mark the change:

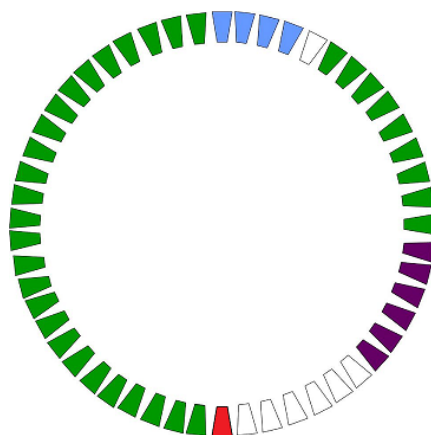
- I'm sure you've noticed that after months of green hangings and vestments, we are using blue - one of the colors for Advent.
- At 8:00 we've changed the hymn that we sing at the Offertory.
- At 10:30, we will sing different service music, and the Nicene Creed will be sung to a different tune than we've been using.
- And at both services we will use a different Eucharistic Prayer, a different post-communion prayer and a different blessing.

But these outward and visible changes are not done just for the sake of saying that we changed something. There are reasons why we do things the way we do.

Last week I read an article by a man who is a Director of Worship in a Methodist Church in Houston. He calls himself a recovering Baptist, writing about the reasons why he thinks being part of a church that observes the liturgical year is a very important Christian tradition. His article is only one of many in a long line of them written by people who have changed their thinking about liturgical churches vs. evangelical, non-liturgical ones. Because well over half of the adults in the Episcopal

Church were brought up in other denominations, it occurred to me that it might be good for us all to learn more or review what we have known about our liturgical year.

In the *Godly Play* curriculum, one of the basic stories that is told is called *The Circle of the Church Year*. The story incorporates a wooden board with a circle cut into it, which holds small blocks painted to represent the various Sundays of the liturgical year. You should have received a card this morning on your way in with a circle like the one in the story, and I'll refer to it in a minute.



During the lesson, we talk about time - that there are all kinds of time like time to go to bed, time to get up and time to go to school or to work. And we talk about how a lot of people talk about time as a line. There are timelines for remembering the history of our country, for memorizing the kings and queens of England, even the story of your own life.

But if we imagine time as a line, look what happens: at the beginning of the line, it is new. It is just being born. But as we move along, the beginning that was new starts to get old; and the ending of the line becomes the new part. So the beginning is like an ending and the ending is like a beginning.

Well, the Church, in its wisdom, tied the ending that was like a beginning, and the beginning that was like an ending, together, so that we would always remember that for every ending there is a beginning, and for every beginning there is an ending.

There are three great times in this circle (you can look at the card now): Christmas (which is one white block after 4 blue ones); Easter (the first white block after the 6 purple ones); and Pentecost (the red block). People, if they aren't paying

attention, can walk right through these mysteries each year, and not even know what's there. We really need some time to get ready to come close to these mysteries.

The time for getting ready for the mystery of Christmas is the called Advent, the season we begin today. It is four weeks long. The Church year begins with the beginning of Advent.

In some churches, the color for getting ready for Christmas is purple. That's a serious color, the color of kings. Here at All Saints we use this deep blue. The blue is a serious color, too, but it is also one of the colors for the Mother Mary. Without the Mother Mary, there would be no baby Jesus.

Now look around and down to the purple blocks. The time for getting ready for Easter is usually purple. Purple is the color of kings, and something is going to happen to Jesus, the King. But he was not the kind of king that people thought was coming. He was a different kind of king. So it takes six weeks to get ready for Easter. It is an even greater mystery than Christmas, so it takes longer to get ready to enter it. The purple season is called Lent.

Now Easter is so great a mystery that you can't keep it in only one Sunday. It keeps on going for six more weeks. During that time after the first Easter, people met Jesus in a new way. He had died on the cross, and that was very sad. But they kept meeting him. Somehow Jesus was still with them, as he still is with us. During the weeks following Easter, we learn about some of the ways people met him and meet him.

After Easter something wonderful happened. The Apostles went outside of Jerusalem with Jesus in this new way. And there they saw him go up. And a few days later the Holy Spirit came down. The Church was born. The Apostles glowed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Their tongues were like fire when they spoke. They were more alive than they had ever been before. That's why the color of Pentecost is red like fire.

The rest of the blocks in the circle are green. The great, green, growing Sundays between Christmas and the beginning of Lent make up the season of Epiphany. This season focuses on the light that has come into the world. The most Sundays you can ever have here is nine, so there are nine green blocks there in the circle. (Just

so you know, the number depends on when Easter is each year, and that depends on the moon and the vernal equinox!)

The majority of great, green, growing Sundays are after Pentecost. Do you know what they are called? They are called "the Sundays after Pentecost."

During these Sundays is the time when school is out, when the summer comes and the days get longer and longer. Children can play outside later. People go on vacation. Then summer ends.

In the fall it's time to get ready for school. The kids need new uniforms and shoes. They get new teachers. And the days get shorter.

Right now the days are really short. It stays dark longer in the early morning, and gets dark very early in the afternoon. It looks as if the light is just about to go out. But just when the light seems to be coming to an end, we reach Advent. The year ends, and it begins again. It is time to get ready to enter the mystery of Christmas - again.

It's all here, in this circle. Everything we need. For every beginning there is an ending, and for every ending there is a beginning. It goes on and on, forever and ever.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life." But in the contemporary translation called *The Message*, Eugene Peterson's Jesus says, "Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping" (Luke 21:34).

Today, and for the next four weeks, we have the opportunity to keep our expectations sharp by preparing ourselves with the take-your-breath-away beauty of these blue appointments, with the smell of incense that takes our prayers to God, with the plaintive music that asks Emmanuel to come to us, and with the sound of rejoicing in the hope and expectation that all things will be put right. Here, at the banquet table where there is room for everyone, let us find our life in the God who made us and set us free.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.