

Advent 2, Yr C, 120912
All Saints

Prepare the way of the Lord.

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

Every year when Advent rolls around, we are exposed to at least one sermon and a multitude of meditations, essays and articles about the fact that Advent is about waiting. That we need to slow down and get quiet and WAIT...in my family it meant waiting to get a tree until just before Christmas Eve -- putting the crèche out on the mantel but waiting to put the figure of the baby in it until Christmas Eve -- waiting to move the Wise Men across the mantel slowly, inch by inch until they arrived at the stable on Epiphany -- waiting to see presents under the tree until Christmas morning (except for presents that we received in the mail) - waiting for EVERYTHING!

But, oh, the anticipation that went along with that waiting! That sense of excitement and expectation that could barely be contained - it felt as if you might actually explode if you had to wait one moment longer for Christmas to get here.

Things are different now than back in the dark ages when I was a kid. Christmas decorations appear in stores before Halloween is over. Tree lots we were filled BEFORE Thanksgiving this year and now are almost empty before the middle of December. Waiting has changed character, too - now we wait to find a parking space at the mall - we wait in line to checkout, usually behind someone who seems to be as slow as...well, as slow as Christmas! We wait in traffic - wait for what used to be "fast" food - wait for 2nd day air to bring us packages that come 3 or 4 days later because they've been taken to the wrong address in our neighborhoods.

And do we wait for all those things with anticipation, with excitement, with a sense of longing and expectation? Hardly ever, it seems. Instead, we wait with impatience, with irritation, with intolerance, with anxiety. We ask others if they are "ready" for Christmas; the answers are almost always some form of "no, I have so much to do, I don't know how I'll get it all done," OR "yes, finally, I've been killing myself fighting crowds and traffic, but I've managed to finish." Those responses aren't about being

ready for the coming of the Christ child, or even for the second coming of Christ. They're about doing all the things that our culture says we have to do in order to have Christmas - parties, presents, decorations, lists - and as soon as Christmas gets here, before we have had a chance to greet the day with joy, we take down the tree, throw it out on the street and put up the decorations, ready to get ready for the next holiday event.

I'm exhausted just thinking about it all.

So how can things be different? Maybe we can change our focus - look with different eyes at the reason for the season.

We recognize that God's world turns things upside down from the ways of our secular world. In Advent, we hear it perhaps more clearly than at any other time. The lessons throughout Advent each year tell us about the nature of the coming reign, which will not resemble any other reign that has been known before. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will dance, the speechless will sing with joy. The hungry will be fed; the outcast will be welcomed in. Things will be turned upside down.

In Luke's gospel today, John the Baptist arrives, quoting the words of Isaiah about how the coming of the Lord will turn things upside down: every valley will be filled, every mountain and hill will be made low, the crooked will be straightened and the rough places will be smoothed over.

And then there's the Song of Zechariah, our canticle this morning. It is the song Zechariah sings when his son, John, is born. But things are upside down here, too: Zechariah, a priest of the Temple, and his wife Elizabeth - are both too old to have children - but they have been given a gift from God with the birth of their son. And although Zechariah is an establishment man, his son John becomes a prophet in the wilderness of the desert, arriving in his not-so-establishment clothing of camel skins and a diet that does not appear on the food pyramid, proclaiming the coming of a king who is not like a king. Yes, indeed, things are being turned upside down.

John the Baptist said that in order to be ready for the change that Jesus would bring to the world, we must repent. To repent is to turn - to turn away from the things that are against God, the things that keep us from being who we have been created to be -- and to turn toward God, living in the way we have been called to live: loving God, loving our neighbors and loving ourselves. Not the way the world operates. Turn away from the ways of the world. Turn toward the ways of God's shalom, where everyone is

whole, safe, healthy, fed and of great worth. Upside down.

As we live in this in between time of waiting, let's look at our world with new eyes - the eyes of expectation and excitement - and see how we can help to turn it upside down. How can we straighten out the crooked places? How can we fill up valleys and make mountains level? Let us listen for the voice of the one crying in the wilderness and prepare the way of the Lord.