

Lessons Ancient and Modern – Advent IIIA – 15 December 2019

I speak to you in the name of He who Is, who Was and who Is to come. Amen PBS

Have you noticed, and I'm certain you have, that all the Old Testament Readings for Advent are from Isaiah? Why do you think that is?

This week is no exception and we hear from the prophet. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." (Isaiah 35.4, NRSV) Isaiah is speaking to the faithful. He is telling them to be patient. To wait. That those who believe in God will be saved on his return. They need not fear in this life, nor in the next life.

The second reading is the Magnificat. Mary has gone to visit her cousin Elizabeth and when John (in utero) heard Mary's voice he leaped for joy. I've always wondered what that would feel like. Can anyone here enlighten me?

In the Gospel for today, John, from prison sends word to his cousin "So, are you REALLY the Messiah, or are we to wait for someone else?" Jesus hears John's followers and asks them what they know of John's ministry. He challenges them to truly know and hear what John is saying. He says something very interesting. "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; **yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**" (Matthew 11.10-11, NRSV)

The faithful would have known Isaiah's writings. They would have heard them repeatedly and would know, as faithful Jews that they could not welcome the Messiah until he was announced by a Messenger. Jesus shows them, he TELLS them that John the Baptist is the one for whom they have been waiting...he is the Messenger for whom they have been waiting.

Now, Jesus does not say that he IS the Messiah. He really shouldn't have to draw that line for them.

How many of you have heard about the O Antiphons?
I know you've all sung them. I'll get to that in a minute...

They are something that have been around since the Third Century.
They are referred to as The Great O's or the Magnificat Antiphons that are used the last seven days of Advent.

They begin on the 17th of December with "O Sapientia – O Wisdom"
18th of December "O Adonai – O God, or O Lord"
19th of December "O Radix Jesse – O root of Jesse"
20th of December "O Clavis David – O Key of David"
21st of December "O Oriens – O Dayspring"
22nd of December "O Rex Gentium – O King of the Nations"
23rd of December "O Emmanuel – O God Among Us or O With Us is God"

I'd like you to turn to (Voice United Hymn 1, Common Praise Hymn 89)

We sing these in a little different order:

- O Emmanuel – God is with us
- O Wisdom – Sapientia
- O God of might – Adonai
- O Rod of Jesse – Radix Jesse
- O Key of David – Clavis David
- O Dayspring – O Oriens
- O Desire of Nations – Rex Gentium

This tune is known as Veni Emmanuel

The text was originally Latin from the 9th Century and was translated by John Mason Neale in 1851

Let's sing Verse 1 together:

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel
and Ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, shall come to thee O Israel*

In the Book of Alternative Services, you find these Antiphons in the original order.
Please turn to page 119, Litany 12.

- O Wisdom, from the mouth of the most high...O Sapientia
- O Lord, and head of the house of Israel...O Adonai
- O Branch of Jesse, standing as a sign among the nations...O Radix Jesse
- O Key of David and sceptre of the house of Israel...O Clavis David
- O Morning Star, splendour of the light eternal and bright Sun of righteousness...O Oriens
- O King of the nations, you alone can fulfill their desires...O Rex Gentium
- O Emmanuel, hope of the nations and their Saviour...O Emmanuel

This is a beautiful, ancient song of lessons.

Lessons about patience.

Lessons about knowledge and teaching.

Lessons about the giving of the law.

Lessons about overcoming death.

Lessons about mourning and living.

Lessons about the Son of God and the Sun that shines brightly, even in the shortened days of winter.

Lessons about unity, peace and hope for the end of all wars.

Ancient lessons that are just as necessary today.

Advent is about waiting. So is grieving.

Advent is about receiving a Messenger to announce the coming of the Messiah.

We know that Messenger to be John the Baptist.

Advent is about patience. Both Isaiah and James letter encourage us to wait. To be patient.

James letter says "Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient." (James 5.7-8, NRSV)

Are you patient? I can be.
But more often than not, I'm not good at waiting.
I get anxious, agitated and fidgety.

The half hour immediately prior to a funeral or wedding is when I am most anxious. For weddings it's making sure everyone arrives when they are supposed to. I tell brides at the rehearsal that they need to be there at least 5 minutes before the ceremony starts or I WILL start without them. Yes, I'm serious.

For funerals, the half hour before is when people start arriving. I try to read the room and see who is going to need comforting. With the funeral director. Make sure my notes are ready. Touch base with whoever is doing the readings and eulogy. Go over the order of service with them so everyone knows what is expected of them and when. As the family arrives I check in with them.
I remind them to breathe, especially when they are crying.

Tuesday past I presided a funeral for a young woman of 18 who died by suicide.

Her parents are not together and dislike one another immensely. I was called on Monday to ask if would meet with the family because this was hitting them hard. I agreed.

They are not religious people, yet people with great faith who needed someone to walk with them.

It's not the most difficult funeral I've presided, but definitely in to the top three. After presiding a funeral for a 28 day old baby and presiding the funeral for my Dad.

A common message that came from walking with the family was encouraging them to be patient. To sit with the discomfort of the grief and begin their daughter's legacy. I encouraged those present at the funeral to hold space with the grieving. To sit in uncomfortable silence and simply hold space. No words or actions necessary. Simply be. Be patient. Breathe.

Society doesn't tend to recognize Advent unless you're referring to a chocolate calendar. From the middle of November or even earlier we are bombarded with shiny things, blaring Christmas music, a frantic pace set.
HURRY! Buy this for a happy Christmas.
HURRY! Bake this for a happy Christmas.
HURRY! Do THIS for a happy Christmas.

I say Slow Down. Breathe. Be patient.
We know how this story begins...we know how a great deal of it unfolds.
We are still waiting to see how it ends.
With Jesus return.

As the Archbishop of Rupert's Land commented yesterday during his sermon at the Induction of Reverend Nicky "it's only been 2,000 years since Jesus left us. In God's time that's just a couple of days. We don't know when Jesus will return. But we do need patience." (The Right Reverend Gregory Kerr-Wilson at the Induction of The Reverend Nicky Keyworth to Grace Anglican-United Church, 14 December 2019, Blairmore, Alberta)

O Come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind,
O bid our sad divisions cease,
and be for us the Prince of Peace.
Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel, shall come to thee O Israel.

Slow Down. Breathe. Be patient. Wait...only a little longer now...

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Advent IIIA – 15 December
Isaiah 35.1-10
Luke 1.39-56
James 5.7-10
Matthew 11.2-11