

Winter 2023

SPIRITUS • GLADIUS

SAINT PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND SCHOOL MAGAZINE



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On the Front Cover

Choir Director Will McLean leads the choir during our annual Lessons & Carols service on Sunday, December 10 at the 10 AM service. Photo taken by Pieter Sigtenhorst.



Christmas

Sunday, December 24

3:30 PM Children's Christmas Pageant with Holy Eucharist, Rite II†

7:30 PM A Christmas Prelude
Music for voices, strings, and organ

8 PM Service of Holy Eucharist, Rite II*†

10:30 PM A Christmas Prelude
Music for voices, strings, and organ

11 PM Service of Holy Eucharist, Rite I

Monday, December 25

10 AM Service of Holy Eucharist

*indicates livestreamed service

†childcare available



Magnificat

The Rev. Samantha R.E. Smith

Rector

In the season of Advent, we turn our soul's attention toward the hope and anticipation of Christ's second coming. We know that Christ has already come to us, as Christmas weighs heavily in the cultural and societal ether this time of year. And it will be such joy to celebrate the Feast of the Incarnation in a few short days. But in Advent, we do not culminate this season with the celebration of Christmas. In Advent, we use the truth of Christmas as a reference point for the hope and trust we cultivate for what will come next - the return of Christ in fullness.

What will come next? What happens when Christ returns? This is where Christmas can really help us envision and embrace a future we have yet to know. In Luke 1:46-55, we receive the Song of Mary, or the Magnificat as it is often known in our liturgical life. It is a proclamation that Mary, the mother of Jesus, makes when she is newly pregnant and visiting her cousin, Elizabeth. She is rejoicing the news that she will bear the Son of God into the world, and she is rejoicing the hope and transformation of the world that will come with that child's life. She gives us all a glimpse into the redeeming work of God and the future the world will know when that redeeming work comes to fullness in the new heaven and the new earth.

The full text of her song is on the next page. It is a beautiful and impossible vision of the world, a vision given to us by God over generations and generations of faithful people and acted out in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. And though it was spoken by Mary at the quickening

of Jesus' earthly life some two millennia ago, it is a vision, too, for all of us who wait for his returning.

God promises us a kingdom where sin and death and pain are no more. But we are not just promised the absence of suffering. We are promised an active flourishing of all life - peace and prosperity for all. At the end of all days, the proud will be scattered, the powerful will be throneless, the lowly will be lifted up, the hungry will be filled. There will be a great righting of the world, where all will stand on the same, level ground before the throne of God. There will be nothing that comes between us and God, and there will be nothing that comes between us and one another - not money, not geography, not judgment, not ideology, not anything. God in Jesus Christ will set the entire world right, including us. This is part of what is meant when we talk about the valleys being raised up and the mountains being made low. It is the great leveling of the world - and it applies even to our own hearts.

I look forward with hope, not just to this Advent and Christmas, but to every Advent and Christmas that brings us closer to the world being made right through the great power and might of a God who saw fit to take on our own nature to redeem us from all things. And I pray with eagerness that the roughness and unevenness in my own heart, in all our hearts, might be made right - that we might know a measure of God's redeemed kingdom here in this life before we know it in full in the next.

A blessed Advent, and a Merry Christmas, to all of you.
May God make our paths level when we meet along the way.

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Detail from *The Annunciation* (c. 1665-1670) by
Bartolome Esteban Murillo (Spanish, 1617-1682)





Adventus

The Rev. Brandon S. McGinnis

Assistant Rector

This year, Saint Paul's took a deep dive into the season of Advent in the form of a new formation class called Adventus. Together we explored what the season of Advent is, where it comes from, and why Episcopalians bother observing it in the frantic weeks before Christmas, one of the busiest holiday seasons in our culture.

The central idea explored in the Adventus class was that the season of Advent is not primarily about the first Advent of Christ at the Incarnation some two-thousand years ago, but his second Advent when he will appear in glory at the end of the age.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, St. Paul puts the appearing of Christ in glory at the end of the age on analogy with the Roman imperial ritual called an Adventus. An Adventus, which simply means "arrival," was an elaborate procession designed to welcome an Emperor to a city in which he came to dwell. So, for St. Paul, the Adventus of Christ had nothing to do with Jesus's birth. Rather, it had everything to do with the culmination of human history, when Jesus would come from heaven to dwell on the earth, thereby ushering in his visible reign over the nations.

The primary subject matter of Advent, then, is the eschaton – the fulfillment of salvation history. Advent, therefore, is not merely a countdown to Christmas Day, but a countdown to the End of Days. It is not primarily the remembrance of Jesus's past, but the anticipation of the world's promised future in Jesus.

The Book of Common Prayer 1979, as well as the Book of Occasional Services 2022, encode the eschatological character of Advent in an assortment of special prayers.

- The Collects for Advent (BCP pp. 211-12) recall Christ's first Advent of humility in order to contrast it with his second Advent of triumph, pleading for God's grace and mercy in the interim.
- The Proper Preface for Advent (BCP p. 378), which is imbedded within the Eucharistic Prayer during this season, recalls God's saving work in Christ in order to give us confidence as we await the return of the world's true King.
- The Seasonal Blessings for Advent in the Book of Occasional Services (BOS p. 10-11) recall that every person of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are active in both the first and second Advent of Christ, acting in unity for the good of all humankind.

But if Advent is supposed to be about the eschaton, then how did it get so closely linked with the celebration of Christ's nativity at Christmas?

For that, we have to wrestle with Church history. As J. Neil Alexander writes, it is "impossible to claim with confidence a credible explanation of the origin of Advent." The limited historical evidence available to scholars today suggests only that there was something like an Advent season existed across Western



Advent

Sunday, December 10
Lessons & Carols at 10 AM*†

Wednesday, December 13
La Posada at 5:30 PM

Sunday, December 17
Greening of the Nave at 11 AM

Sunday, December 24
Advent IV Service at 8 AM

*indicates livestreamed service
†childcare available

Advent always brings with it some special events. This year, we hosted our annual Lessons & Carols service and the Greening of the Nave. We also organized Las Posadas, an event we feature every three years!

Europe as early as the 5th century, and that these diverse local traditions were gradually conformed to the 4-week pattern favored in Rome.

The rest is a mystery. In some places, Advent likely started as a season of eschatological reflection in response to regional wars and plagues. In others, Advent might have started as a season of Baptismal preparation analogous to Lent. Unfortunately, there is no clear origin or evolutionary path of the Advent season.

What is clear is that the Liturgical Movement of the 19th and 20th centuries consolidated and renewed the eschatological focus of Advent. Thanks to the work of the Liturgical Movement in shaping lectionaries and prayer texts, Advent in the modern era has a renewed focus on Christ's appearing in glory at the end of the age.

Of course, the work of liturgical theologians is no match for the forces of Western consumer culture. The commercial Christmas season now begins shortly after Halloween! The result is that in today's popular culture Advent is almost

completely absorbed into Christmas. This is often true even in the Church's own preaching and programming during Advent.

So, to sum up, the season of Advent might come "before" Christmas on the cycle of the Church calendar, but it is not merely a pre-Christmas season. It is an opportunity for us to celebrate in an anticipatory manner Christ's appearing in glory at the end of the age. We set aside four weeks in the life of the Church for this purpose, but the truth of the matter is that for the Church it is always Advent.

Advent is the only epoch in which the Church will ever exist. The Church can only ever exist between the first and second Advent of Jesus Christ. We are always remembering his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, while always looking forward to his appearing in glory at the end of history. The whole life of the Church is spent waiting for and hastening the coming of Jesus Christ and the consummation of his Kingdom on the earth. Yes, indeed, for the Church it is always Advent.



The Burgess family lights the first advent candle before the 10 AM service on the first Sunday of Advent.



Bringing Joy

Sara Allison

Director of Youth Ministry

This year's outreach projects have wrapped up and I'm so grateful for the help we received in sharing with our community. Thank you so much to everyone who donated, supported, and prayed for the missions of the church.

Our Angel Tree project provided gifts for local foster children through Arrow Child and Family Ministries. This organization allows placement families to come and "shop" for their own child and we ended up giving more gifts than they were expecting. While we were given 15 children to shop for, everyone who brought gifts in gave so generously that we were able to fill their closet. In chatting with the director of the program I learned that they have an ongoing need for toys and also need school supplies over the summer, so be on the lookout for more ways to help them in the months to come.

The youth group did our own small coat drive for the Cove and the kids were so thoughtful in picking out winter gear for our area homeless highschoolers. The Saint Paul's kids carefully chose colors and sizes that they thought would best help kids just like them, and I'm so grateful for their consideration. The donated coats will go into a closet for students from the Cove to choose from, allowing them some choice in their winter wear.

In partnership with Waco High School, we were able to give 69 gift cards for teachers to receive as small tokens of appreciation for their hard work in our community. Their PTA president shared "Thank you for your extravagant generosity and support of Waco High School teachers with the many gift cards you donated for our teacher appreciation event. We are truly humbled by your kindness and care of our teachers! You have added so much JOY to this season. Thank you for this tangible expression of love and cheer!"

The work we do to uplift our community is never in vain. Each time we share a gift or buy a coat or write a thank you card to a teacher we are able to show God's love to someone. I am grateful for those of you who gave \$10 just as much as I'm grateful for those who donated a ski jacket. Our work is bringing people joy, one by one, and I hope you will celebrate that with me!





Advent Wreaths

Lisa St. Romain

Director of Children's & Family Ministry

Advent is my favorite season of the year. The joy of sharing songs and Bible stories filled with hope and anticipation create a place for Jesus in my heart. Your children may come home from church singing The Advent Wreath Song that asks "Who are you waiting for?" It is a catchy tune that stresses the importance of waiting for Jesus, our King. For four weeks, I sing Advent songs and share the stories of Gabriel, Zachariah, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph. I teach the children that without Advent, the celebration of Christmas feels a bit empty.

"The King who was coming is still coming. This is full of mystery. A mystery is hard to enter sometimes. That is why this time of Advent is so important. Sometimes people can walk right through a mystery and not even know it is there," says Jerome Berryman, author of *Godly Play*. "This time of year you will see people hurrying in the malls buying things and doing this and that, but they miss the Mystery."

The Advent practices and activities vary from educational and devotional to those that are less demanding and time-consuming. One of my favorite activities during this season is using and/or creating an Advent wreath. An Advent wreath marks the weeks before Christmas with four candles- three purple (or blue) and one pink.

On each of the four Sundays of Advent, light a new candle; every day during that week light the same candle. On the second Sunday of Advent, light a new purple candle as well as the one from week one. Light the pink candle on the third Sunday of Advent. The pink candle represents the halfway point to Christmas and offers a glimpse of the light soon to come. On the fourth Sunday of Advent, light all of the candles. Say a prayer with the lighting of each candle.



Find a time when the people in your house can gather together to light the candles like when you eat dinner or maybe bedtime if you have small children. My wreath sits on my breakfastroom table which is in the middle of my home. Even unlit it is a reminder of the season.

To make an Advent wreath you can purchase a circular medal frame. Weave greens and ribbons in and out of the form. It can be a fun and creative challenge. There are great variations to match age and skill levels. Purple chains or ribbon can substitute for greenery. This year at the Advent workshop the children made wreaths from clay and placed four battery operated candles on them. If you were not able to attend our annual Advent workshop try using what you have at home. Use four votive candles, four mismatched candles, or the stubs of candles from previous years.

So get ready! Sing songs, read the stories, talk about angels, count the days either with an Advent calendar or Advent chain and pray. Maybe you will use your Advent wreath and do all of the aforementioned! In this way we will be ready for the Celebration of Christmas.



BLESSING OF THE WREATH

As part of your family's Advent traditions, you may choose to say a blessing over the Advent Wreath. This blessing comes from Forward Day Day's pamphlet, The Advent Wreath and is a great start to the Advent Wreath tradition. While saying the prayer of blessing, the leader may touch the wreath or make the sign of the cross over it.

Leader: O heavenly God, you make all things holy by your word of blessing. Bless, we pray, this wreath which we have made that it may be a sign of your eternal life and love. As we light these candles and offer you prayer and praise, may our hearts and minds be prepared for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Teaching Christmas Joy

M'Lissa Howen

Head of School

The weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas bring anticipation and excitement to a child's life. We bombard our children (and grandchildren) with one central thought—your desires are about to be realized. “What do you want?” is the go-to conversation starter when speaking to anyone under 18. “If you are good, Santa will bring you presents” becomes the default disciplinary tactic. For a solid month, we steadily bang the drum that happiness will be found on the receiving end of material gifts.

This article is not a creed on commercialization. Parents and grandparents obsess and overspend on gifts to show children they are loved. That central fact is why the story of Ralphie and the Red Rider BB gun makes A Christmas Story must-see December television. Ralphie is a good kid and who does not warm to the idea of his happiness? We know that our Ralphies will grow up and face the world's challenges, but we hope that the knowledge that people love them will balance the world's hard edges. And while excess leads to excess, a small emotional sugar high is not the end of the world.

The funny thing about this scenario is we realize how good gift-giving makes us feel. The gift of the Red Rider BB gun meant at

least as much to Dad as it did to Ralphie. The act of giving the gift is how Dad copes with a world of ruined turkey dinners, failing furnaces, and broken major awards. One would imagine that if we wanted our children's hearts to be full and warm our first focus in the season would be teaching them how to give rather than what they will receive.

The Christ whose birth we celebrate identified the necessity of compassion when he emphasized the Golden Rule as one of two keys to life. (Matthew 22:35-40). So this Christmas season Saint Paul's Episcopal School selected compassion as the character trait to celebrate. Our verse for the month comes from Ephesians 4:32:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven you.”

Every day we see the purity of children's hearts. Their smiles when they have made a present for mom or dad reveal that they naturally understand the value of Christ's teachings on compassion and his presence in their lives. We are working hard to make sure that their understanding blossoms into

the realization that the value of compassion goes beyond families and lasts longer than the Christmas season.

Blessings and Peace,
M'Lissa Howen, M.Ed.
Head of School



◆◆◆ Saint Paul's in Photos



◆◆◆ Saint Paul's in Photos





SAINT • PAUL'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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WORSHIP SCHEDULE



8 AM Service of Holy Eucharist, Rite I
10 AM Service of Holy Eucharist, Rite II*†

*indicates Livestreamed services
†childcare available

You can find Sunday's order of worship at
saintpaulswaco.org/worship

You can find our livestreamed services by visting
facebook.com/saintpaulswaco

Saint Paul's Vestry

Suzanne Alexander, *Senior Warden*
Ford Taylor, *Junior Warden*
Pam Crow, *Treasurer*
Gina Ford, *Clerk*
K. Paul Holt
Suzy Nettles
Erika Jones
Linda Bostwick
Mike Indergard
John Miller Mayfield
Len Brown
Kristi Carlile
Kyle Deaver
Felicia Goodman
Pieter Sigtenhorst

Saint Paul's Staff

The Rev. Samantha R.E. Smith, *Rector*
The Rev. Brandon S. McGinnis, *Assistant Rector*
The Rev. Al Melis, *Deacon*
The Rev. John Wells, *Retired Priest Associate*
The Rev. Preston Yancey, *Campus Missioner*
Lisa St. Romain, *Director of Children's & Family Minsitry*
Sara Allison, *Director of Youth Minsitry*
Iona Easterwood, *Accountant*
Brandi Goddard, *Parish Administrator*
Sarah Martin, *Director of Communications & Membership*
Craig Finley, *Facilities Director*
Paul Hicks, *Sexton*
Charles Watson, *Assisting Sexton*
Willie Sergent, *Retired Sexton Emeritus*
Will McLean, *Choir Director*
Dr. Jeffrey Peterson, *Organist*
M'Lissa Howen, *Head of School*



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