



From the Associate Rector

Advent: (1) *The coming or arrival, esp. of something important;* (2a) *The period of preparation for Christmas...*

American Heritage Dictionary, fourth edition

How do you prepare for something—or someone—important? Chances are you start a good way in advance. You plan, often in great detail. You make sure to set aside the time and/or resources necessary. Accommodations, decorations, food, clothing, who will sit where, what will happen when...the details can be endless. The planning and the preparation takes on a life of its own, sometimes obscuring the end purpose if we're not careful. And as we plan and prepare, the anticipation builds. We wait--expectantly, hopefully, sometimes impatiently. We wonder and dream about time with that special loved one, how all our plans will turn out.

Advent time is preparation time, a time of expectant waiting. But what are we preparing for? Are we preparing for the coming of Christ—or are we preparing for that joyful day of December 25, that feast day that celebrates the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem so long ago? Perhaps one might ask, "Aren't they the same thing?"

Not necessarily.

We know how to prepare for December 25—the Feast of Christmas. Traditions vary—but in our American culture the preparation takes on monumental proportions. We buy gifts, put up decorations, send cards, bake, cook, and clean. There are parties to attend, perhaps parties to host. There's the tree to consider, maybe furniture to rearrange and in some cases, travel plans to make. We have a list of to-do's long and plentiful, with a nativity scene, some carols, and a church service

or two thrown in to remind us of why we are in this frenzied state.

But Advent calls us to prepare for the coming of Christ—not just some 2000 years ago, but in our lives now, and also for the Second coming. This preparation is much harder. It involves letting go of our own agendas and plans, and making room for God's plan for a restored and reconciled world. It means focusing less on things and more on relationships. It may require being still and silent in a world that thrives on noise and activity.

So this December, this Advent, let us try something new. Instead of cleaning the living room, we could clean out our hearts—removing the cobwebs of old grudges and nurtured hurts and slights. We can be honest with God and ourselves—and strip away the decorations of the masks and roles we hide behind. We can look for God and God's blessings in our lives even while we are seeking that special gift. We can prepare ourselves to be open, expectant, ready to receive that which God has for each of us: the gift of God's overwhelming, unconditional love. A gift shown to us by sending us Jesus, God's only son, to live among us as one of us—and through the Holy Spirit, to live inside us.

Prepare the way of the Lord—in your heart.

In peace,

Mother Debbie