



Faithful Centurion Anglican Orthodox Church

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Sunday Report



Today was the Fourth Sunday in Advent, the period including the four Sundays before Christmas; the first Sunday of which is always the nearest Sunday to the feast of St. Andrew (30 November). Advent is a season of preparation and penitence. We prepare ourselves to celebrate the coming of Jesus at Christmas, but we also look forward to his second coming. The liturgical color for this season is purple reminding us of the Kingship of Jesus and that Advent is also a season of penitential preparation.

Weekend weather has been pretty frontal, with fast moving, but weak, cold fronts moving through. The year has been much colder than before. Thanks be to God for global warming; we are nearly being overrun by mastodons. A few degrees colder and they would have us all. 😊 Sunrise temperature was a fairly warm 37°F on Mount Olympus with cloudy skies and variable winds. The start of church brought a lovely 42°F, which cooled back to 41°F with rain by the end of church. Even though the weather was perfectly lousy, we had four people for the service nonetheless.

Gathering Song

Jack Arnold played *Amazing Grace* for the gathering song.

Amazing Grace

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.



We try to pick our gathering songs to have a wonderful message, be easy to sing and suitable for guitar accompaniment. *Amazing Grace* is one of Hap's absolute favorites.

Propers

Each Sunday there are Propers: special prayers and readings from the Bible. There is a Collect for the Day; that is a single thought prayer, most written either before the re-founding of the Church of England in the 1540s or written by Bishop Thomas Cranmer, the first Archbishop of Canterbury after the re-founding.

The Collect for the Day is to be read on Sunday and during Morning and Evening Prayer until the next Sunday. If you have a hard time remembering, "Do I read the Collect from last Sunday or next Sunday during the week?" Remember Sunday is the first day of the week. There are also two Bible readings, the Epistle and the Gospel. While they are "lessons", they are not the First Lesson and the Second Lesson, they are the Epistle and the Gospel. The Epistle is normally a reading from one of the various Epistles, or letters, in the New Testament. The Gospel is a reading from one of the Holy Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Collect is said by the minister as a prayer, the Epistle can be read by either a designated reader (as we do in our church) or by one of the ministers and the Holy Gospel, which during the service in our church is read by an ordained minister or our Deacon Striker.

The propers are the same each year, except if a Red Letter Feast, that is one with propers in the prayerbook, falls on a Sunday, then those propers are to be read instead, except in a White Season, where it is put off. Red Letter Feasts, so called because in the Altar Prayerbooks the titles are in red, are special days. Most of the Red Letter Feasts are dedicated to early saints instrumental in the development of the church, others to special events. Some days are particularly special and the Collect for that day is to be used for an octave (eight days) or an entire season, like Advent or Lent.

The Propers are found on Page 95-96, with the Collect first:

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

The Collect.

O LORD, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

The Collect for the First Sunday in Advent is on Page 90:

The First Sunday in Advent

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. *Amen.*

¶ This Collect is to be repeated every day, after the other Collects in Advent, until Christmas Day.

Ryan Hopkins read the Epistle for today, which came from Paul's first letter to the Philippians, starting at the Fourth Verse of the Fourth Chapter.



Paul calls on us to "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." We are to lead the world to Christ by example, to "Let (y)our moderation be known unto all men." In this Advent season, as always, "The Lord is at hand." We are to worry about nothing, "but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Be joyful in all things, not for all things. And in the words we find at the end of the Holy Communion Service, may "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Or to quote another, "Trust in God and Dread Naught."

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Deacon Striker Jack Arnold read today's Holy Gospel which came from the Gospel



according to Saint John, the First Chapter, beginning at the Nineteenth Verse. When they heard rumor of John the Baptist, Jews wondering if this might be the Messiah, sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who art thou?" John told them, "I am not the Christ." Then, they cast about for who he might be, "Art thou Elias?"

Confounded, they asked, "Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." The Pharisees people were somewhat confused and asked, "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?" John answered them, saying, I baptize with

water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

Interestingly, the same theme is found over and over, as is oft the case with truth. There are those among us who just plain will not see. For, there are none so deaf as those who will not hear and none so blind as those who will not see.

This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art

thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Sermon – Time and Action

Today's sermon brought the Collect, Epistle and Gospel together and is partly contained in the forewords above.



As is oft the case, today's propers are all tied together. The Collect asks for God's help for us to accept His Help and do it His Way. That is a thought that permeates or at least should permeate our entire lives. It is oft supposed Christians are dour souls, with no sense of happiness or humor. Perhaps this thought comes from those who have heard what the Bible says, filtered through some odd prism, but have never actually read it. After all, the one said to be the most dour of all, Paul, tells us to be happy. Not just happy, but to REJOICE. REJOICE in the Lord ALWAYS and AGAIN I say REJOICE! How much more fun can you have? We are also to be moderate in everything we do, no excesses, an even keel. Work hard, but maintain a time and space for our family, honor our country,

and above all honor God. He goes on to tell us if we think we need something, simply ask God for it! Speaking of God, John recounts John the Baptist's role in preparing the way for Jesus. The Pharisees just had trouble with the simplicity of his message. They were looking for something more complex, less straightforward, something more like themselves.

Jesus also tells us to put our trust in the Lord, then not to worry. He knows how counterproductive, indeed how destructive worry can be in our lives. We know it will do no good, we know it will only hurt our cause; yet we do it. Is this not a proof positive of how much we need His Help? How hard is it to Trust in God and Dread Naught? Very, yet to make progress this we must do.

The world is extremely complex; it is full of problems, temptations and difficulties. It is full of obstacles for us, yet all Christianity offers is a few simple solutions. We often hear that there are no simple answers to complex questions. Actually, that is not true. There are simple answers to complex problems, they are the only ones that work. The problem is they are not the answers people want. Most people do not want to know what they are supposed to do, lest they have to do it. They want to be told that what they want to do is at least okay, even though it is clearly not okay.

Once again, when you think about being a Christian, think a bit about these quotes from GK Chesterton:

- "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried."
- "The word "good" has many meanings. For example, if a man were to shoot his grandmother at a range of five hundred yards, I should call him a good shot, but not necessarily a good man."
- "The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people."
- "Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions."
- "A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it."

G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

We are called to a new and different life, we ask the Lord to lead us and follow us, to keep us always. Our goal is to do the Lord's will, not to avoid 613 laws. To do what is right and be humble.

Bishop Ogles' Sermon

Bishop Jerry provided his sermon notes for today. I thought them incredibly interesting, I always enjoy them, but there was something about this one that was more than usual. I am certain you will find them very enjoyable. As always, I cannot commend it to you enough.



Sermon Notes for 4th Sunday in Advent 18 December 2011 Anno Domini

St. Luke 3:1-17

"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall

we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable."

Evil men of that day rule in the Holy Place of Jerusalem just as the *abomination that maketh desolate* is now standing in the Holy Place of America's churches. That abomination has been severely censored by God in both the Old and New Testament. We have ordained and consecrated men (and women) who are openly homosexual to the ministry in the churches in America. These wicked people now stand in pulpits and even in episcopal authority over those pulpits. How long do we feel God will withhold His wrath for this willful disregard for His Word? "*.....and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all."* (Daniel 11:31, 37) and "*When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)"* (Matt 24:15) This has direct reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus of Romans in 70 A.D., but it also has a parallel meaning for us today who disregard the Word of God and allow unholy men to serve in ministry. Christ fulfilled the law of sacrifice so, regardless of what is done on an altar has no relevance, but what happens in the pulpits of the Church have a gravity that we had best begin to deal with or suffer the wrath to come.

God establishes a definite chronology for the Coming of His only Begotten Son so that the Scriptures will all agree as to the words spoken of the prophets centuries past. He sets the stage for our understanding. The Scripture cannot be broken regardless the futile attempts of higher critics and textual 'engineers' to the contrary. "*Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene.*"

The stage is set for the arraignment of all of those despots who would, not only preside over the land throughout the ministry of Christ, but also at its closing through their direct complicity in His trial and crucifixion. It was to Tiberius Caesar that the land must pay obeisance, and to a local Pro-Consul named Pontius Pilate that would preside over the enforcement of that obeisance. Annas and Caiaphas sat in the seat of High Priest. Little did they realize that their own wickedness would be consummated in the de-thronement of their role as High Priests and the One whom they wish to destroy would take that title in Eternity future. "*Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests..*"

"*.....the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.*" It is amazing how clearly and often the Word of God comes to His people in the Wilderness. Perhaps, in the providence of God, only one man has been determined to receive that particular Word, therefore, the Wilderness is the appropriate place for its being revealed to him. Our prayers are better heard when we pray, not for the recognition of

men, but in our closets alone with God. The Word of God is such an all-potent and valuable sound! *FRIENDS, if there is one great thing in this world, it is the Word of God; `great in origin, great in thought, great in promise, great in beauty, great in purpose, great in power, great in its results ! It hangs as by a golden cord from the throne of the Highest, and all heaven's light, life, love, and sweetness come down into it for us. It hangs there like a celestial harp ; the daughters of sorrow tune it, and awake a strain of consolation. The hand of joy strikes it, and feels a diviner note of gladness. The sinner comes to it, and it discourses to him of repentance and salvation. The saint bends an ear to it, and then it talks to him of an intercessor and immortal kingdom. The dying man lays his trembling hand on it, and there steals thence into his soul the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."* *"When thou passest through the waters, they shall not overflow thee, and through the fires, thou shalt not be burned."* *"Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!"* *"The last enemy that shall "be destroyed is death."* *"This mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and death shall be swallowed up in victory."* Where is promise, where is song like this ? Magnify the Word of God! E.E. Adams (The Reformed manner of preaching is the expositional approach.) If we wish to preach with authority, we must preach the Word of God and not the word of the man delivering the sermon.

"And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Has this approach in preaching been disannulled? Should we, too, not be as fervent as George Whitfield, John Wesley, and Charles Spurgeon in preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins? But, alas, I must be dreaming – SIN is no longer fashionable to be condemned – not in our very modern and broad-minded world! He came into the country about Jordan, the same waters in which our Lord was baptized by John, and whose sweet waters never fail the wilderness traveler. Luke does not even mention the apparel of John, but goes directly to the heart of his mission as a bolt of lightning to the lightning rod – "...preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

"As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Here again God inexorably joins His prophetic utterances of the prophet to the events unfolding before us. (Isaiah 40:3-5) If you are preaching sound doctrine, sound truth, sin, repentance, and grace, you will also be today as a "Voice crying in the wilderness." You shall not find yourself flocked about with souls of men and women starving and thirsting for the pure Water of Life and Bread of Heaven. They have their own synthetic bread and impure, polluted waters to drink, and they desire none other. But, to their detriment, like Herod, Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilot, men do not seek refuge in the City of God because they feel a false security already in their world-favoring sin. In the Old Testament Law, the children of Israel were commanded to establish cities of refuge throughout the land to which men guilty of serious crimes could flee for refuge. Now comes to Jordan Waters the perfect likeness of that City of Refuge in Jesus Christ. We are guilty beyond doubt. We are murderers and sinners yet, God has provided a Refuge and an Ark for our salvation! Flee to Christ, and He will receive you. In those ancient cities of refuge, the gates were never shut – night or day, but always welcoming to the refugee from justice who we all are. If we are granted justice, we shall be condemned; but, if granted grace, we shall be accounted righteous and forgiven.

"Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **Generation of Vipers!**" Careful John, you are going to hurt someone's feelings by being so 'judgmental.' Or perhaps you recognize them for what God's Word has called them? Political correctness is the furthest thought from John. Here John refers not only to the men who unworthily occupy the seat of Moses and of David, but to the people at large. Israel has rejected God as a nation. Christ tells the Jewish leaders that the Kingdom shall be taken from them and given to a people bearing the fruits thereof." (**Matthew 21:43**) So do we long to see the stone temple rebuilt and the daily sacrifices begun anew in rejection of that once-and-for-all sacrifice made by our Lord? Has America become a generation of vipers? Though there remain many devoted Christians among us, have we given our powers over to evil forces in propagating every immoral concept through our vast control of media? Have we used our national resources to impose values on Third World countries that they would otherwise righteously abhor? Yes, we have done, and we continue to escalate that policy through the IMF and World Bank. Our national voice has often spewed poison from our mouths (media).

"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Fruits worthy of repentance have their birth in a *"broken and contrite heart."* (**Psalms 51:17**). Before repentance can come nationally, it must come personally, for every nation is comprised of ever so many hearts. The sum total of hearts measure the righteousness of the nation. We cannot forever count upon the favor of God based on the Godliness of the Founding Fathers, and neither can Israel count on their bloodline in Abraham to merit salvation. Only those who possess the likeness of Abraham shall be the children of Abraham – in thought, word, deed, and faith. The Seed of Promise was only foreshadowed in his son, Isaac, born out of time of child-bearing. Christ is the ultimate Seed of Promise and we cannot count Abraham to be our father if we have not accepted the promise of forgiveness and salvation in Christ. If the natural seed fail, God is able even to raise up children from the stones. The promise is made available to all for the acceptance or rejection of it.

"And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Here is the dire warning which we would prefer to avoid! We are all as trees of either righteousness or unrighteousness. The axe has already been brought to our place of standing. The Woodsmen sizes us up to determine if our fruits are worthy of justifying our remaining in the forest, or has our hearts rotted away and rendered us a waste of forest space. The axe is already about to swing at our root – our character and testimony in Christ. If we have not been fruitful trees, we shall be cut down and burned – and so has the moment of decision come for this old Israel. Instead of works mete for repentance and mercy, their fruit is bitter and condemning. Perhaps that axe hangs over the prairies and alabaster mountains of American today as well.

Is there no remedy for our national and personal sins? There IS an answer! "And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?" What shall you do to regain the favor of God? What can the nation do to re-establish that favor? "He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." A greedy man cannot abide this counsel, neither a

man of fashion and sophistication. We covet our fine suits and robes. We are fond of our full and elaborate pantries stocked with every dainty food and cuisine. But even a greedy man (as Scrooge in Charles Dickens' story) can be rendered not greedy by one single quality – LOVE! This was lacking in Israel, and it may be becoming scarce in our nation which mislabels Love as SEX and value of persons by fame and money. I recently read of an occasion of more than seventy years ago when an elderly missionary couple were returning from the harsh mission fields of Africa. They had deprived themselves of a luxurious home, fine food, and the benefits of society for the straw-covered hut, the rough diet, and the inconvenience of living in a wild land for all of their adult lives. They had given all they had of resources, health, and vigor to the service of God's less fortunate people. Now, broken and tired, their continuance on the mission field had been deemed 'unproductive' by their church and they were called home to be "put out to pasture" as an old work horse in its waning years. As they began to disembark from the ship at the port of New York, they struggled to drag their few belongings with them, but the crowds were overwhelming and cheering. The old couple was prevented from leaving the ship until a famous Hollywood celebrity, returning from a European cruise, had received the adoration of the gathered crowd and had been met by his chauffeur-driven limousine. When the crowd thinned, the old couple continued down from the ship and awaited the next taxi. They waited alone because no one took notice of their years of sacrifice. Is that LOVE? These two had given, not of their extra coat, but their ONLY coat. They had given their meats and received gruel for the sake of their service to God and man. Of what value was the fruit of the Hollywood celebrity's vanity?

Every man and woman has a calling in Christ. It may not be as an active missionary on the foreign field, but it shall always be a missionary in the place where you are placed whether as a doctor, a lawyer, a butcher, a teacher, or a carpenter. Whatever our calling, we must reflect the nature of a virtuous and loving heart. "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages." We do not often think of 'publicans' (tax collectors) and soldiers as serving God directly, but we have the words of John to suggest otherwise! If we deal in money, do so with honesty. If we are serving our country as soldiers, we are to do no violence to any man (unwarranted force or mean-spirited action). We must not take from the enemy land that which does not belong to us, but we must be satisfied, as good soldiers, with our pay allowance.

The people began to wonder about John because of the beauty of his words. Remember, his words have been entreating them to repent; and he has been warning them of the destruction to come if they fail to repent. Today, most people would walk away, but these people had enough presence of mind to know that he spoke truth in beauty. Many today lack that discretion. "And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not." When a minister or a layperson speaks the truth of God, his words will have the force and power of God behind them.

"John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose." John did not suffer that same vanity of many ministers. He discerned the thoughts of the multitude and answered humbly. Here we see the greatest of all prophets confessing

his own inadequacy before the One whose Way he was preparing. He's not even worthy, as a household servant's role, to unloose the shoe latches of Christ. Do we stop to reflect that we have no merit whatsoever apart from that imparted to us by Christ Himself?

"He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable." He is the REFINER of Gold and Silver. His instrument of purification is fire. The Fire of the Holy Ghost will purify those who are called and chosen of God. They are made more and more pure through the refining process (sanctification). Fire and Wind will be the choice tools of Christ at purging the wheat from the chaff. He will fan the wheat as it falls to earth (from the Tribulum) and the chaff will be blown aside while the pure wheat falls to earth. The chaff will then be burned as death and Hell are cast into the Lake of Fire. (Rev 20:14)

We will celebrate Christmas at our next Sunday Worship. Of course, Advent is our early celebration of Christmas as well. Let us remember that our beautifully lighted and ornamented trees represent that beautiful Tree of Life that came down to us a Christmas. The candles will remind us of that Light which led the Wise Men and, later, burst out in the brilliance of the Day Star and the Sun of Righteousness. Let us not forget to wish all we meet a very Merry Christmas (not holiday)! There is no reason that we must abandon the joys and love of Christmas on December 26th. We should clasp those to our bosoms every waking moment of the coming year.

Bishop Dennis Campbell's Sermon

Bishop Dennis is a brilliant speaker, making biblical precepts perfectly understandable, even to me. Oft he provides the text of his sermons and I take the utmost pleasure in passing them on:



Making Straight

John 1:19-28

Fourth Sunday of Advent

18 December 2011

At this time of year our minds turn to the preparations for Christmas. Most of us have our trees decorated, and are making plans for guests to visit, or for our visits to family and friends, and our kitchens are filled with smells that make us wonder if we can wait till Christmas to eat the goodies. We are grateful for these things, grateful to celebrate Christmas, and, if done in the right frame of mind, the decorations, and pies, and gifts, and cookies, and visits, and cakes are good things and legitimate ways to celebrate the birth of our Saviour.

Other things also occupy our minds, things like a young couple making their way to Bethlehem, a baby in a manger, angels, and shepherds, the daily readings from Isaiah and Revelation, and the Collect for the First Sunday of Advent, which we pray daily in Morning and Evening Prayer. These are enduring traditions of Advent, which have been treasured by generations of God's people.

Today we come to another Advent tradition, the reading from the first chapter of the Gospel according to John, which tells us about John the Baptist. In this passage, the

Baptizer was preaching and baptizing on the east side of the Jordan when the delegation from Jerusalem came to him. It was an era when hope of the Messiah's advent ran high, and the religious authorities wanted to know more about this man who was making such an impact on the people. It seems to me that they were ready to receive John as the Messiah and take him into Jerusalem in glory, for they gave him every chance to claim that position. Yet every time, he refused their honour. "I am not the Christ," not "the prophet," not even Elijah, he said. I am just a "voice... crying in the wilderness." He claimed no glory for himself and asked nothing for himself. He had one purpose, to point people to Christ. "Make straight the way of the Lord." Thus he said to the priests from Jerusalem, "there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is whose coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

"Make straight" is a quote from the book of the prophet Isaiah and refers to making a road by removing rocks and trees and obstacles so people can travel to their destinations. John is saying he has come to call people to build a highway on which the Messiah can come to them. This highway is, of course, a spiritual highway, a highway of the heart. Building this kind of highway consists of removing spiritual obstacles, such as the sins of the flesh and the pride of the mind, attitudes of indifference and self-sufficiency, replacing them with Godliness of mind and dependence on God. John is really calling Israel back to her original purpose in the plan of God. He is calling Israel to love God and to walk together in unity and holiness as the people of God.

The call to make straight the way of the Lord is not for Israel only. It continuously sounds forth through the centuries, and addresses us as fully as it did the Jews. How do we make straight the way of the Lord?

We make His way straight by continuing in the faith once for all delivered to the saints. This is the faith God gave through the prophets and Apostles, and through His own Son, Jesus Christ. It consists of the doctrines and ethics recorded and preserved for us in the Holy Bible. The faith tells us God created the world in righteousness, but, we, through our own sin have turned it into the seething cauldron of strife and sin it is today. And we, through our own personal sins, have become the enemies of God, fully worthy of His righteous anger. The faith tells us that to save us from the penalty of sin, God Himself became a Man and suffered death on the cross, bearing in Himself the wrath and death our sins deserved. That sinners who call upon Him and trust His sacrifice to forgive all their sin for all time will be saved from God's wrath and reconciled to Him in peace and love forever; and that one day He will end the reign of sin and evil in this world, by coming back and putting all enemies under His feet and establishing His reign of righteousness forever. This is "the Faith."

We make His way straight through a continuous, life-long act of trusting God to forgive our sins and to welcome us into His fellowship and love through what He accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This means to confess your own sin and worthiness of punishment, and also to believe God has forgiven you. This is what it means to "have faith."

We make His way straight by living life according to His will and in His love. Scripture uses many words to describe this life. Holiness, righteousness, and faithfulness express its essence, and each of them means to turn away from sins and distractions and to return to God's original purpose and calling. This call goes out to the Church as a whole, and to the individual Christian.

Once in a while I think about what it would be like if we really got serious about loving God and walking together as His people. I can see us ordering all of life under the Lordship of Christ as we joyfully serve Him in our work, and home life, in our recreation, and, of course, in our Church life as we fellowship in Christian love and hold the faith in "unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life." I can see us acting like a community, more than that, like a family, like a body, like new creatures in Christ. I can see us working together without envy or discord. Every word we speak is a word of encouragement and edification, every action is helpful, and all is done to build up the body in love. Once in a while I can imagine that. I hope you can too. I hope you see it as the goal of this parish, and as your own personal goal, and I invite you to dedicate yourself to making it more and more of a reality, as Paul wrote, excel still more, in it in the coming days and years.

There is one more thing I have to mention today; that we make straight the way of the Lord, by announcing, or, proclaiming the faith. This invites hearers to come into the faith.

As soon as we hear the command to make straight the way of the Lord, we become aware of our own weakness and inabilities, and we may be tempted to not even attempt the task to which we are called. It would be hopeless indeed if we were not promised the help of God in every aspect of it. Truly "we are sore let and hindered" by the lingering wickedness that still abides in even the most saintly of people, and which leads us into the sins we commit. But with God's help, we can do better, and better, and better, and He is willing to help. He is working within you now to form you and renew you according to His will. He promises to help you in everything to which He calls you. This is why we pray as the Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent directs us, that God will come among us in His great power to speedily help and deliver us.

Let us pray.

O LORD, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

New Nametags

We had no new nametags today.

After Church Hospitality

Sadly, no dog nuts today! Actually, no snacks of any kind. Is this sad or what? On the other hand, after church we all went to Fred's for really great hamburgers, so it was not all bad! Maybe next week the fatted dog nut!

After church goodies providers as currently signed up:

Date	Name
18 December 2011	Dru Arnold
25 December 2011	Opportunity Available
1 January 2012	Jack Arnold
8 January 2012	Opportunity Available

People in our Prayers - <http://faithfulcenturionprayerteam.blogspot.com/>

Why? Prayer is an extremely important activity.

It is not that God knows not our needs, for He surely does. Yet, Jesus commanded us to ask God for those same needs. In addition to the obvious of asking God for help, offering thanksgiving and the like, prayer helps us focus our thoughts on how we might do God's work.

The Prayer Team of the Church of the Faithful Centurion was established to help our members and fellow Christians pray for those in need and to give thanks as well for the blessings we have been granted.

Who can be on the list? Do I have to be a member of the Church of the Faithful Centurion to be prayed for?

No! The only qualification to be on the list is that you want our prayer team to pray for you. We are Christians and are happy to pray for you, no matter who you are. If you want help from God, you are our kind of people.

What is the commitment from the prayer team?

Each member of the team will pray for the desired outcome at least once per day.

How do I get myself or someone else on the prayer list?

You can email one of the prayer team leaders: Jack - jack@faithfulcenturion.org or Dru - dru@faithfulcenturion.org, or call the church office at (619) 659-3608 or fill out a prayer card at church.

What should I ask for?

Depends on what you want. Some people merely want God to be asked to heal their ills and be mentioned by their first name, others want a specific outcome and / or have more of their personal information known to the team. Ask for what you want. It is your desire and need for prayer the team is attempting to meet. For typical examples, see the list below.

Updating the Team

If you are on our prayer list, or if you have submitted a person that you have asked us to pray for, please update one of the team members or Hap in person, by telephone or email. It helps to be able to pray specifically for these individuals including their specific needs; plus if they get better, it is nice to give thanks!

Please note that on the yellow (maybe green or orange if you get an old one) cards at church, you can ask that those to be prayed for have their names disseminated to the prayer team. Those names will be said in church and appear here. Or, you can ask that their names and purpose be kept confidential, then only Hap will know to pray for them.

Prayer List Notice – If you have someone on the prayer list and their needs have changed, please let us know. We'd like to update our prayers to reflect the need and most important to give thanks!

Travel

No travel this week.

Move

The Thomas Family is on a short tour assignment in Guam for the next two years. Please pray for the assignment to go well for Kurt and for Mary and the kids to make new friends and Kristyna and Mitchell in particular to develop good friends and

school mates there so as to further their development.

Birthday

Don Patton celebrated his 49th birthday 13 November 2011.

Jack Arnold celebrated his 19th birthday with us 26 October 2011.

Homebound or Infirm

Sara's mother is in a state of deteriorating health, both physically and mentally. Please pray for peace of mind for her and the ability for both Sara and her mother to put their cares and worries on God's shoulders so they can deal with the many problems involved.

Departed

William F. Dean a great Christian disciple of Rawalpindi, Pakistan, passed away. Mr. Dean was father-in-law to Eileen Jacob, wife of Bishop Ernest Jacob of the AOC of Peshawar, Pakistan. Until recent circumstances of age, he was a regular and active member of UP Church, Raja Baazar, Rawalpindi. Mr. Dean served as Librarian for Gordon College for a period of thirty years. Mr. Dean's funeral service was 25 November 2011 Anno Domini.

Colonel Don Frisbee, USAF passed away on 12 October 2011, after bowel surgery, infection and pneumonia. Please pray for comfort for his wife Bev and their family.

Colonel Don Durbin, USAF passed away on 12 October 2011, after what appeared to be an abdominal problem. A visit to the hospital found that he had congestive heart failure and liver problems. Shortly thereafter, he developed multiple blood clots and dementia. Don passed away shortly thereafter with his family by his side. Please pray comfort for his wife Lynn and their family.

In need of a miracle or understanding of God's Plan

Todd and *Kenny* have both been fighting osteocarcinoma for over five years and have been told their time here on earth is nearing its end, absent a miracle from God. Both are ready to go home and leave the pain, but would like to stay. Please pray for them and their families.

Healing

Bill Aitken had a third abdominal surgery on 22 November 2011. This time the tumor was removed. The surgeon said pathology indicates the tumor with all margins out, along with a few lymph nodes and fatty tissue. The tumor is an intermediary (risk) sarcoma, but should not come back. There is a new chemotherapy pill Bill can take for extra precaution; he recommends Bill see an oncologist. Bill has an appointment on 13 December 2011, with the surgeon for follow-up and recommendations going forward. Please give thanks for the surgical team doing their very best, a successful surgery and pray for a good end result. Please pray that Bill might live a long and healthy life to the honor and glory of God. Pray also for peace of mind for Bill and his wife Sara.

Ed Malcomb, Bishop in the Church of England had a major heart attack Thanksgiving week, fell, hit his head on the floor. He seems to be past major coronary issues for the present. However, there are apparent memory issues associated with the head trauma. Please pray for the medical team treating him and for his recovery.

Walt Dexter had a stroke the week of 12 September 2011 and is still mostly half paralyzed. Please pray for a full and complete recovery for Walt and for peace of mind for him and his wife Fran.

Gil Garcia was back in the hospital for a re-do of his colostomy and a couple of relatively minor skin surgeries. Kaiser transferred him to the Community Extended Care Hospital of Montclair, supposedly because they had two doctors on staff there. In just over a month, Gil saw them once after he was admitted. After a formal written complaint, he was transferred back to Kaiser Hospital in Fontana. Gil is hopeful he will be treated and released shortly. He has lost some weight and looks forward to going home. Please pray for peace of mind for Gil and his wife Mary.

Dotty Valkenaar has been diagnosed with a reoccurrence of breast cancer and had a double mastectomy and no reconstruction on 23 August 2011 in Seattle. Seemingly everything went very well, however there were complications in the recovery, but she is home. Now a torn muscle has surfaced in her shoulder, perhaps as a result of positioning during surgery. There is concern over a reoccurrence of the cancer and some question as to whether to do chemotherapy or not. Dotty is also having problems with fluid building in her upper body area. Please pray for guidance for the medical team treating her and for her to make the correct decisions regarding treatment and pray for continued peace of mind through trust in God for Dotty and Lew, her husband, as well as their entire family.

Lew Valkenaar developed ankle and leg pain and swelling in his lower right leg due to a blood clot. The blood clot taken care of he is on Cumadin for six months and wearing a cool compression stocking on one leg, kind of a Michael Jackson thing.

Morris Martin, 91, was hospitalized with pneumonia, he in rehab now and doing well, he has been irritated by having a feeding tube in until his throat can heal and be retrained, but he has responded with renewed effort when he failed the swallow test on 21 July 2011. He had a bit of a fever from which he seems to have recovered; it is hard, but he is strong. Give thanks for his great attitude and trust in God. Pray for strength and peace of mind for Morris and his family, in particular his son Paul. Pray for his trust in our Lord and for both him and his family to let God carry their worries while he recovers.

Steve Sundberg had a heart attack after Easter. After some time, the medical team treating him decided he was not a candidate for stents and a five-way heart bypass was performed the week of 6 June 2011. Please give thanks for an apparently very successful surgery and also pray for his complete recovery and for his three children and family who are very worried about him, pray also for his trust in our Lord and for both him and his family to let God carry their worries while he recovers.

Matt Alcantara, age 15, has Osteosarcoma (bone cancer), a very rare and often lethal form of cancer with limited treatment options. This is a disease that is about 90 percent fatal in a couple of years. He has no hip joint on one side, but he walks and swims! Courage? Guts? You bet! Matt is set up for bone scans at the end of December. Please pray for a good outcome. Thanks be to God for the way things have gone. Thanks also for the great faith of Matt and his entire family. Their faith and trust is a wonderful example for each and every one of us. But, now is not the time to stop praying. Actually, it never is the time to stop praying!

Shamim Gray underwent a lumpectomy on Saturday 6 November 2010 at Bethesda Naval Hospital, with apparent great result. Please pray for a complete remission of the cancer. Pray also Shamim will maintain her great attitude and trust in

God.

Judith Clingwall, is afflicted with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). She is currently in Laurel Place, an extended care facility in Surrey, British Columbia. Judith's condition seems stable a present, although the medication levels have been increased. Please pray for her to take an active part in her own life, for her strength, peace of mind, trust in God and remission of the disease so she might return home to her family. Pray also for strength for her husband Martin as he deals with all the problems and stress of Judith's situation.

Becky Madden is paralyzed from the neck down as the result of a tragic shooting accident. She has made it home and to church in a new donated magic wheelchair. Please pray for further recovery for Becky, as well as strength and guidance for each of those involved.

Betty Macauley, Tim's mom, is currently in a state of failing health. Please pray she will gain interest in life around her and actively pursue life here on earth. Please pray for her family, in particular her son Tim, as they try to help her.

Lauralee underwent a lumpectomy on Friday after Thanksgiving. A further anomaly has been discovered and she had additional preventative radiation treatment. Please pray for a complete remission of the cancer. Pray also Lauralee will maintain her great attitude and trust in God.

Luca, 5 years old, from our church family in Perth, Western Australia, who has just been diagnosed with leukemia. And for his Mum and Dad and extended family.

Greg Chase asks that you pray for his family:

Diane, Greg's wife, has a positive attitude dealing with the ongoing treatment of her ulcerative colitis. They are grateful for a positive attitude and would be pleased to see physical progress.

Phyllis, Greg's mom, has stabilized as the result of the good home care she is receiving and recently celebrated her 89th birthday.

Vince (age 13), reoccurrence of cancer, recent testing found a nickel sized tumor in his lungs. The doctors are consulting with a specialist in Houston. Please pray for guidance for the medical team and for peace of mind for Vince and his family.

Obra Gray continues to take day by day. Please continue to keep Obra in your prayers, and give him the strength of knowing the Lord is with him and will never forsake him. Obra needs security of what lies ahead of him, and only the Lord can grant the solace to answer his prayer.

Bashir Ahmed, father of Shamim Gray, has been blessed with the Lord's breath of life to stay on this earth for the time being. But, things are hard for him and his loving wife, who cares for him. They have two young nieces living with them who see no real need to help, pray for God to enter their hearts. Above all, pray for his entire family to open their hearts to accept all God's love will bring them.

Kay Denton (Mrs. Kay) is still home and doing pretty well considering the bones in her neck and hands are degenerating as a side effect of her kidney failure. Her thumbs are not particularly useful any more. Mrs. Kay asks everyone who is praying for her know how grateful she is for their prayers. As always, she retains her trust in the Lord and her positive attitude

Guidance

Steve asks that you pray for difficulties he is having with his family. Please pray that

the Holy Ghost will enter into his heart and provide him with the heaven sent inspiration that he needs to see clearly and deal with problems and the courage to do what needs to be done in the manner it should be done.

Jacquie to open her heart to God and accept His Love and Grace.

Hap and *Ryan* both ask you to pray they might be able to trust God will help them make the right decisions at the right time and not to worry uselessly, to change those things they can change, accept those things they cannot change, sleep well to be able to do the correct things with a clear head and that they will open their hearts to the Holy Ghost.

Armed Forces & Contractors

Airman Donny Patton (Kadena AB, Japan), Jordan (USMC – 29 Palms), Neal (USN-Afghanistan), Trevor (USAF - KC-10 Boom Operator), Trevor (USN – Whidbey Island, EF-18 Pilot), Kurt Thomas (USN – Guam),

Persecuted

Around the world, Christians are under attack, not only in the Muslim world, but from Hindus and others in India. Also, they are under continual attack in the name of “Separation of Church and State” in the western world, as it becomes actively atheist or pro-devil buddy. Please pray for God’s guidance and protection for all persecuted Christians and those around them.

Thanksgiving

Hap gives thanks for safe and interesting travel this week.

Various Special Requests

We ask that you pray, please ask God that the Holy Ghost might give you insight into how you might make the lives of your friends and family better. Remember helping others is not just those who you don’t know!

Please join us in praying that the *Free Teen Guitar Class* will be continue to be an opportunity for God to work in the lives of the kids and their families. Please ask God to guide the class to new opportunities to make Him known to others. Help us to let the love of our Lord shine through us into their lives, putting Him first, so that He might enter in to their hearts and lives.

Question that only you can ask

What would you like to know about our history, what we believe, what we do or how we operate? *Hap* is looking for material for the continuing education class and *Thought for the Day* material. Help us help you. Please send your question to *Hap* so we all can get an answer. Just because you don’t know the answer to your question doesn’t mean you are the only one who doesn’t know. But, if you don’t ask, no one will know.

I’d like to get a different point across or announce something

If you have a different point of view, I would be happy to give you room to get your point across. While this publication is my perspective on events, I recognize not everyone may agree and that some people would like to express their own opinion. If you want to write something, please forward your item to *Hap* (with a note as to whether or not you would like editing help) to: hap@faithfulcenturion.org.

Epistleers

We post the list of Epistle Readers in the Sunday Report each week so you can either plan your attendance or your pre-reading as the spirit so moves you.

Date	Reader	
25 December 2011	Ryan Hopkins	Christmas Day
1 January 2012	Ryan Hopkins	
6 January 2012	Ryan Hopkins	Epiphany
8 January 2012	Ryan Hopkins	
15 January 2012	Ryan Hopkins	
22 January 2012	Ryan Hopkins	
29 January 2012	Ryan Hopkins	

The near future, as well as Next Sunday

25 December 2011 – Christmas Day – Holy Communion - Service start time 1000 (10:00 am); welcome or gathering songs before the service at 0945 (9:45 am); **Time 1000 (10:00 am); Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**

1 January 2012 – First Sunday after Christmas – Morning Prayer - Service start time 1000 (10:00 am); welcome or gathering songs before the service at 0945 (9:45 am); **Time 1000 (10:00 am); Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**

6 January 2012 – Epiphany Day – Evening Prayer - Service start time 1900 (7:00 pm); **Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**

8 January 2012 – First Sunday after Epiphany – Morning Prayer - Service start time 1000 (10:00 am); welcome or gathering songs before the service at 0945 (9:45 am); **Time 1000 (10:00 am); Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**

15 January 2012 – Second Sunday after Epiphany – Holy Communion - Service start time 1000 (10:00 am); welcome or gathering songs before the service at 0945 (9:45 am); **Time 1000 (10:00 am); Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**

22 January 2012 – Third Sunday after Epiphany – Morning Prayer - Service start time 1000 (10:00 am); welcome or gathering songs before the service at 0945 (9:45 am); **Time 1000 (10:00 am); Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**

29 January 2012 – Fourth Sunday after Epiphany - Morning Prayer - Service start time 1000 (10:00 am); welcome or gathering songs before the service at 0945 (9:45 am); **Time 1000 (10:00 am); Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**

5 February 2012 – Septuagesima – Morning Prayer - Service start time 1000 (10:00 am); welcome or gathering songs before the service at 0945 (9:45 am); **Time 1000 (10:00 am); Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**

12 February 2012 – Sexagesima – Morning Prayer - Service start time 1000 (10:00 am); welcome or gathering songs before the service at 0945 (9:45 am); **Time 1000 (10:00 am); Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**

19 February 2012 – Quinquagesima – Holy Communion - Service start time 1000 (10:00 am); welcome or gathering songs before the service at 0945 (9:45 am); **Time 1000 (10:00 am); Location – 10603 Burrell Way, Descanso, CA**