

THE
LION'S TALE

The Seasonal Magazine of St. Mark's Episcopal Church

2019
Advent
Christmas
Epiphany

“And suddenly there was with
the angel a multitude of the
heavenly host, praising God.”

(Luke 2:13)



SAINT MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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David Tubbs, Music Director
Madeline Wilson, Parish Admin
Ken Knott, Senior Warden
Kurt Cramer, Junior Warden
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AN INVITATION TO ADVENT SILENCE

by the Rev. Adam Thomas

One of the four items I addressed on my sabbatical was building a spiritual practice of silent meditation into my daily routine. I began with a slim book given to me by parishioner Jaye Lyon called *Word into Silence*. The writer, John Main, says, "The important aim in Christian Meditation is to allow God's mysterious and silent presence within us to become more and more not only a reality but the reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, everything we are."

The practice of meditation goes back to the early days of the church, and monks like Main reclaimed it in the second half of the 20th century. While many think of silent meditation to be the exclusive property of Eastern religious traditions like Buddhism, the thread of such practice has always existed in Christianity, as well. There are many ways to enter into a spirit of meditation. Here's the way I have been doing so.

The first day I began with five minutes.

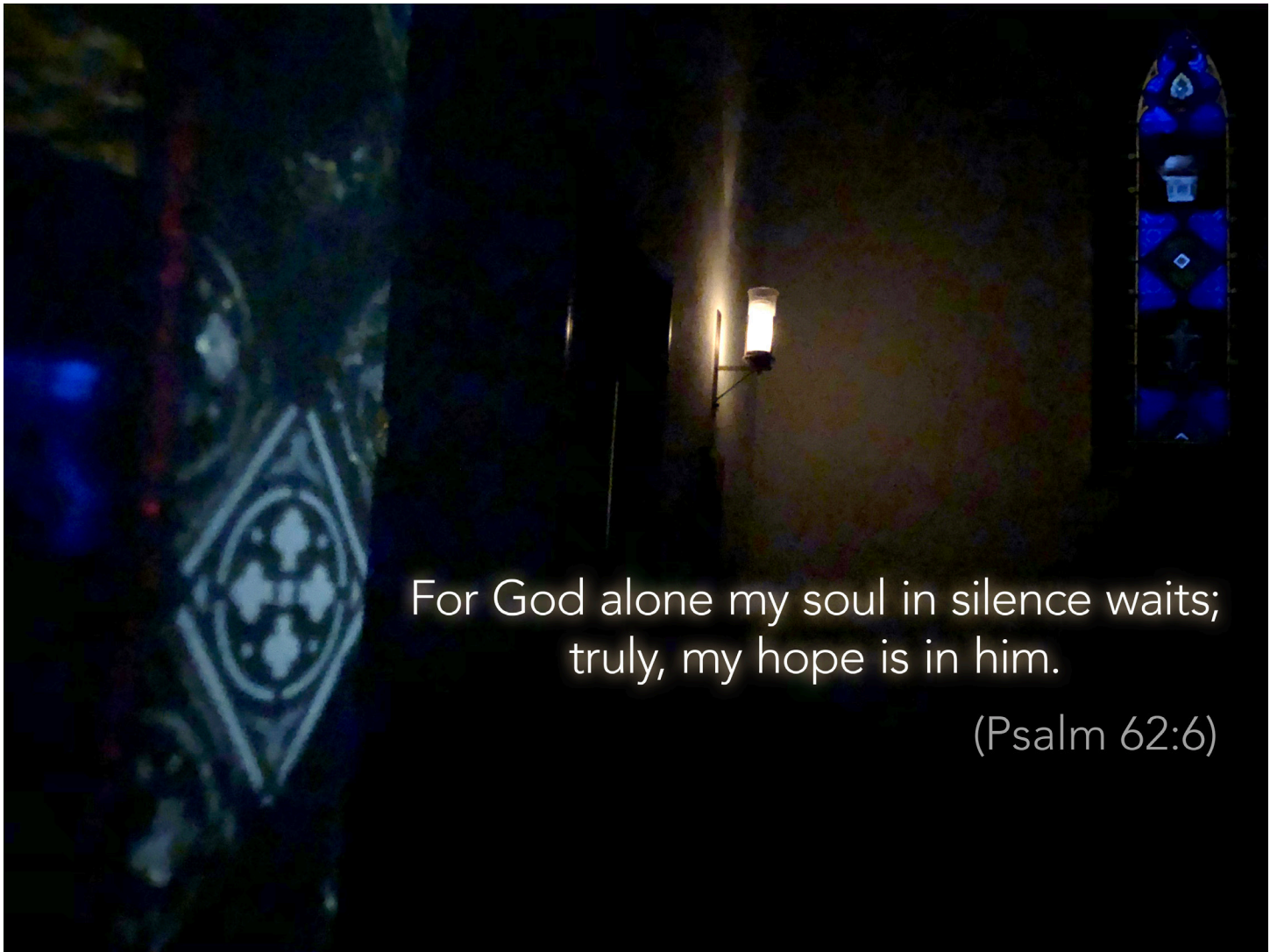
I sat still and upright as the practice teaches. I chose the recommended mantra (that is, the word I say over and over again while meditating in order to chase away distractions and move deeper into God's presence). The word is *Maranatha* – "Come, Lord Jesus" – which we find at the very end of the book of Revelation. I say the word slowly as four equal syllables. Over and over again until I am saying it not consciously but autonomically, like breathing. Indeed, the mantra becomes my breath.

I'm not sure how many stray thoughts entered my mind during those first, tentative minutes of meditation, but the total was probably in the dozens. That's okay. It's a practice, and you have to start somewhere.

That first day was back in June. In those early days, I tried to meditate each day but I only managed it about half the time, including one memorable morning at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. More recently, the practice has begun to solidify into my routine, and I am meditating every morning for twenty minutes. And I have noticed myself inching toward a calmer center, a more integrated personhood. I'm amazed everyday how fast twenty minutes can go by.

Of course, the stray thoughts still enter my mind, but the mantra sends them on their way like a breath that disperses a cloud of steam. When the time of meditation ends, I feel grounded in a way like no other. I think the reasons for this are threefold:

- (1) Excepting one tiny, brief glimpse, I have yet to viscerally, mentally, or spiritually feel God's presence in meditation yet. But my faith reminds me that God is the motive force behind my desire to be in communion with God. Thus, it is God inviting me into silence. God is there and together we are working to bring me deeper into the awareness of the mystery and clarity of God's presence.



For God alone my soul in silence waits;
truly, my hope is in him.

(Psalm 62:6)

- (2) Our world is fracturing along so many binaries right now that to stay sane I must remember that true reality transcends either/or thinking. Non-dual imagination allows us the space to discover this reality, which is the reality God (as One Being and a Trinity of Persons) continues to create. Cultivating a practice of silence is probably the best way to nourish non-dual imagination.
- (3) I write so many words – thousands every month in sermons, posts, articles, stories, and books. In many respects my life as both a priest and an author centers around crafting words. So to bring myself to a spiritual practice that leaves words behind is refreshment for my soul.

I am still a complete novice at this meditation thing. But the best way to begin a new spiritual practice is just to start – and then ask God for perseverance along the way when my dedication wavers. This Advent, Jaye Lyon and I are offering a weekly time Wednesdays at 5:30 pm to come and practice silence. Jaye will begin with a forum on her experience on Sunday, December 1st, with the first session Wednesday the 4th. (She will be discussing a different version of meditation, though they all send us to the same place in the end.)

We invite you to try on silence as a spiritual discipline this Advent. Please join us even if you are only a tiny bit curious.

WE NEED CHRISTMAS

by Jim Izzo

The annual commercialization of Christmas is in full swing once again. In fact, this plague descends upon us earlier each year, as retailers begin bombarding us, through all the means at their disposal, with ads to buy gifts, the more expensive gifts, the better. We cannot escape this assault, unless we remain in our homes for at least two months, with the various types electronic equipment we own turned off, an impossible feat, even for Luddites like me.

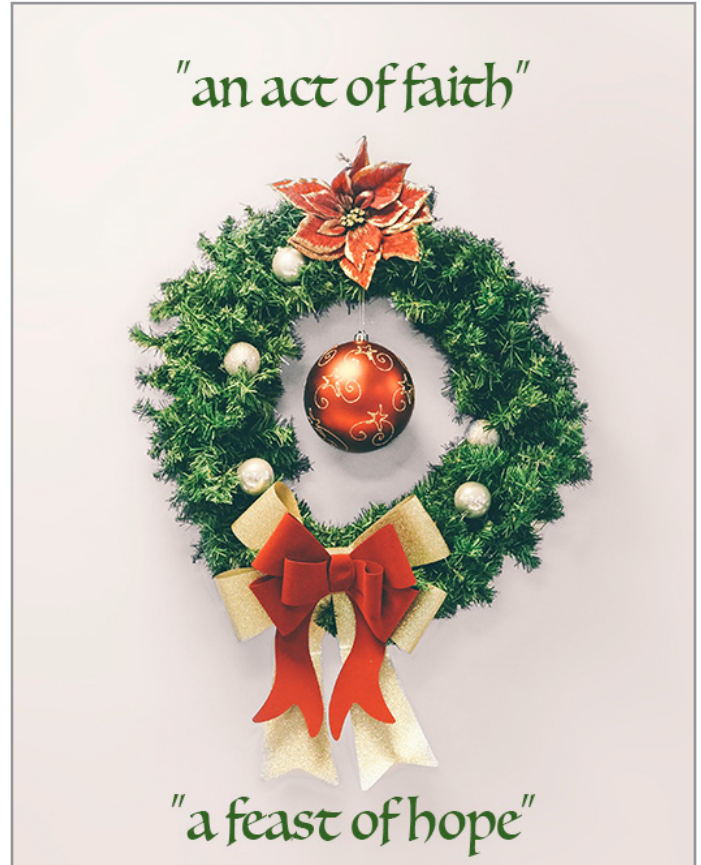
Silence, the antidote to sales, has become a negative concept in our society. Many people are even afraid of Silence. There is a Silence about Christmas, nevertheless, especially Christmas Eve, which is both eloquent and holy. "In Silence I hear the voice of God," wrote St. Augustine. Those people who cannot function without their ear buds or cell phones should try doing without them for a part of each day.

It has become increasingly difficult in our society, perhaps in any society, to remember the "true meaning of Christmas." The phrase has become a cliché, but the effort to recognize and celebrate this "meaning" is still worth the effort.

In one of the most moving sermons I ever heard, decades ago now, the priest described Christmas as "an act of faith" and "a feast of hope." He explained the first of these phrases as "God's act of faith in the world and in human nature," and the second phrase as "God's affirmation of the goodness of creation and the dignity of the human person."

I remember those words and several others our pastor spoke that Christmas Eve because I wrote them down. I developed this habit of taking notes during my teaching career so that I could share profound, moving, inspiring words and thoughts with my students.

The Christmas sermon was so moving because it was idealistic yet realistic enough to believe in, even with the world situation at the time. Even the most idealistic person cannot deny or ignore the troubles in the world and in our country today. What can we do, however, to change something that is wrong? Buy a gift – through your church or civic organization – for a child who would otherwise not have one at Christmas. Volunteer at a soup kitchen or similar place to feed the hungry.



Visit a sick or disabled person, or a person who is alone, in a nursing home, for example. Each of us can make a difference in the lives of a few people, or even one person, and the Christmas season is a good time to start.

I suspect that many of us rarely, if ever, have the kind of Christmas we think we should have. Often, someone is missing: a parent, a child, a spouse, a friend. It is impossible not to hear the silence of their absence.

We will not have "peace on earth" without "goodwill toward men," the priest concluded. Despite everything that is wrong with the world and perhaps in our own lives right now, I contend, there is also much that is right and good. Christmas gives us the opportunity to focus on this fact, however briefly.

We need faith and we need hope and we need divine help to create the kind of society and the kind of world in which there is less suffering, the kind of world in which people desire to live.

We Need Christmas!

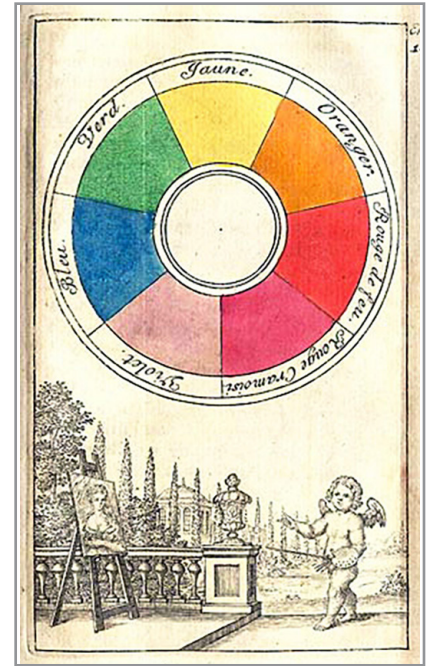
EPISCOPAL 101

by *Bev Olson*

Every year we begin again, begin a new year. The church calendar begins again too, not on New Year's Day, but on the first Sunday of Advent. Each year we start over and hear the stories of our faith anew. Each year we read from one of the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke -- and every three years we begin this too again. This cycle is marked on the altar with changes of the altar cloths and hangings.

This year at St. Mark's we will mark the Advent with a new altar cloth of a new color: blue. While purple – often a traditional advent color for the altar and the wreath – is the color of penitence and royalty, the blue – also traditional – is the color of waiting, preparation, and hope.

At Christmas, the altar will change its colors from blue to white and gold, to the colors of joy and celebration. These colors change again on the twelfth day of Christmas, Epiphany; they will change to green, representing growth.



THE STORY BEHIND THE HYMN “IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER”

by *David Tubbs, Director of Music*



“In the Bleak Midwinter,” a widely loved Christmas carol, is based on a poem by the English poet Christina Georgina Rossetti, the author of three collections of mostly religious poetry and four devotional books. This poem was first published in January of

1872 as “A Christmas Carol,” and only later was the title changed to “In the Bleak Midwinter.”

Rossetti, born in London, England on December 5, 1830, was home-schooled by her Anglican mother. She never married, having turned down two wedding offers, one for being a Roman Catholic, in accordance with church doctrine (she was an ardent Anglican). Instead, she devoted herself to her family and her faith. She ministered to former prostitutes, worked with the Society

for Promoting Christian Knowledge and concentrated on her life as a poet. She grew up in a family who appreciated the arts. Her father, Gabriele, an Italian professor, studied Dante, and her two older brothers, Dante and William, helped form the nineteenth-century art movement, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a community of English painters, poets, and art critics. Because of her beauty, Christina often served as a model for portraits, especially of the Madonna.

Rossetti's life was full of suffering. She suffered from Graves' disease, an autoimmune disease causing hyperthyroidism with troubling symptoms. In 1888 she wrote to her brothers: “Beautiful, delightful, noble, memorable, as is the world you and yours frequent, I yet am well content in my shady crevice—which crevice enjoys the unique advantage of being to my certain knowledge the place assigned me.” Then in 1893,



ADVENT REFLECTION

by Tim O'Leary, Ministry Intern

In this Advent reflection, I will reflect on the word “GO.” In the so-called “Great Commission” which concludes Matthew’s gospel, Jesus tells the disciples, “GO therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20; RSV). Jesus commands the disciples to go. The Greek word for go here (*poreuo*) can mean the physical act of traversing some distance, from a point of origin to a point of destination (Danker and Bauer’s *Greek-English Lexicon*). This suggests that Jesus is always our point of origin, he is our beginning; but he tells us he is also with us until we arrive at our end. *Go* is a commandment; it is a word spoken by someone with authority who hopes that those hearing will obey out of love. In this season of Advent, we can reflect on how God, within God’s own self, both issues and responds to God’s commandments. In the Incarnation, God the Father commands God the Son to *go*: to go into the world God created, with all its confusion, ignorance and chaos; to go into a fleshly body vulnerable to pain but also capable of laughter and intimacy; to go from house to house and synagogue to synagogue; to go to the city of Zion with its glorious Temple. In Jesus, God decides to move from a point of origin to a point of destination, with all the risk involved, and in Jesus God invites us to *go with God*. God’s movement in Jesus is God’s narrative. But it is not the only narrative of God we know about. Rather, it is the culmination and climax of God’s narrative as revealed in Scripture: the calling of Abraham, the Exodus and the giving of the Law to Moses, the promise of the Holy Land and the establishment of kings, the Exile

and restoration of the Temple, the moment of God’s becoming flesh, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. This is a long narrative, a long movement; it is a rich and complex story of how God goes with the people of Israel through history and then invites “the nations,” those who do not belong to the covenant people, to *go* with God, to live in the kingdom of heaven that God is establishing on earth.

This narrative of the way God *goes* becomes the way that we also *go*. A second meaning of the Greek word *poreuo* is to live, walk, or conduct oneself (Danker & Bauer). It is not simply movement from point A to point B, but it is the way one moves from point A to point B. How does Jesus want us to walk? Jesus invites us to walk towards the nations. The “nations” during the time of Jesus were those people who did not worship the God of Israel or obey his Commandments; their relationship to the one true God was incomplete. But throughout the Hebrew Bible there is a hope that these “nations” will journey to Jerusalem, to the city of Zion, to worship the God of Israel in the Temple. Jesus affirms this hope but also alters it: instead of those nations coming to us, we must go to them. But what do we say to them, what do we teach them, *how should we walk*? The most important thing we can say, the most fundamental way we walk, is not through word but through action: baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism is the way we *share* the Good News, the glorious narrative, of God’s journey with Israel and God’s journey in Jesus. In Baptism, we declare to the world and to ourselves that God’s most profound desire is that we walk with God as God has chosen to *walk with us* through the eternal, active life of our Lord Jesus.

Advent and Christmas Schedule

“Pilgrimage to the Heart” Silent Meditation

Wednesdays, Dec. 4, 11, & 18 at 5:30pm in the library

Gingerbread House Workshop (Toddler Playgroup Fundraiser)

Sunday, Dec. 8th at 1pm

Christmas Pageant

Sunday, Dec. 15th during 10am service

Carol Sing and Potluck Supper

Sunday, Dec. 15th at 4:30pm

Christmas Eve

Family Service at 4:30pm

Choral Prelude at 10:30pm

Festive Service at 11pm

Christmas Day

Contemplative Service at 9am

Lessons and Carols

Sunday, Dec. 29th



FIRST CLASS MAIL

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