



EPISCOPAL CHURCH of the  
**HEAVENLY REST**  
God's Love. For All.

# *Lay Reader*

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS · VOLUME 12, ISSUE 7 · ABILENE, TEXAS

## From The *Rector*



# O we need a little Advent

– David Romanik

*“But what are Heaven’s alarms to hearts that cower  
In wilful slumber, deepening every hour,  
That draw their curtains closer round,  
The nearer swells the trumpet’s sound?  
Lord, ere our trembling lamps sink down and die,  
Touch us with chastening hand, and make us feel Thee nigh.”*

“Advent Sunday,” The Rev. John Keble (1792-1866)

A few years ago, a parishioner sent me an article entitled “Let Christmas Come Early” by Michael Brendan Dougherty. Dougherty, a self-proclaimed “Advent snob” (or at least a recovering “Advent snob”), recalls that in previous years, he complained mightily about the appearance of Christmas displays at the beginning of November and scoffed when radio stations switched to 24-hour Christmas programming the week before Thanksgiving. In this article, however, Dougherty suggests that the encroachment of Christmas might be a necessary way to insulate ourselves from a world that feels ever more precarious. What better way to distract ourselves from war and economic turmoil than by browsing the internet for seasonal recipes, singing “Santa Baby,” or shopping for shiny baubles? “Let [Christmas] come,” Dougherty concludes. “Break out the jazzy crooner Christmas albums. Deck the halls, find a new recipe for Chestnut soup...And let a little of the joy come early. I think we need it.”

This is hardly a fresh argument. Every year, it seems as though some relatively prominent person who was once jealously protective of the season of Advent decides that they are actually okay with celebrating Christmas early. There are even songs about it: how else can you explain the popularity of songs like, “O we need a little Christmas, right this very minute!” While it can be hard to argue with this logic, there is a level at which it misses the point of Advent. Advent isn’t ultimately about delaying gratification. Nor, as Dougherty suggests, is it even about liturgical precision or being in touch with the “metaphysical order of the universe.” Rather, Advent is a way of reframing the way we look at the world.

In one of the quintessential Advent texts from Isaiah, the prophet predicts that the Messiah “shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor.” Isaiah is suggesting that the Messiah, the one whom Israel was waiting for will judge, not according to his eyes and ears, but with righteousness. Moreover, it’s pretty clear that the righteousness that Isaiah is talking about is not the righteousness of those who are being judged; it is the Messiah’s own righteousness: his relationship with God, his faithful obedience to God’s commandments, which he wears like a belt around his waist. Isaiah envisions a ruler who will see the people around him not as the world sees them, but as God sees them.

If we are wondering what this looks like, we need look no further than Jesus. Repeatedly in the gospels, people tell Jesus everything they think he needs to know about a person: “this woman was caught in adultery,” “this man is a tax collector,” “she’s a Samaritan who has had five husbands.” Their expectation is that, on the basis of this information, Jesus will reject these sinners and insist that they be excluded from society. Jesus, however, refuses to allow these people to be defined by their failures or by the way that society has defined them. He refuses to judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear. Instead, he looks at these people and truly sees them as persons created in the image of God. Moreover, the Messiah looks at us not as he wishes we were, not as we wish we were, but as we actually are.

***“Advent  
... is a time  
to recognize  
our need for  
Emmanuel,  
God with us.”***

This brings us back to Advent. Advent is not just a time to wait patiently for the coming of the Christ child. It is a time to acknowledge that the world has not yet experienced the fullness of redemption. It is a time to confront the painful realities of the world with honesty and hope. It is, in other words, a time to recognize our need for Emmanuel, God with us. Now, I don't mean to suggest that this is impossible when we put up a Christmas tree right after Thanksgiving. We must ask ourselves, however: is our early Christmas celebration simply a way of blinding ourselves to the realities of the world? Are we using Christmas carols and decorations not to acknowledge the redemption promised in Jesus Christ, but because "we need it" to make ourselves feel better? Are we throwing a sheet of wrapping paper over those people we'd rather not pay attention to? If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," then we need to reconsider our experience of Advent. We need to use this season as a time to pay attention: to look at the world not as we wish it was, but as it actually is.

Christianity is a faith for realists. Our faith frees us to confront the painful realities of this world with courage and conviction, confident that even the deepest sorrow will be redeemed through Jesus Christ. Advent is a time to acknowledge that ultimately, we need more than "a little Christmas"; we need a Redeemer.



## Exploring Spiritual Treasure Schedule

– Karen Boyd

December 1st - The Church Calendar

December 8th - Confession & Liberation

December 15th - Class check-in: Answering questions about the class & confirmation/membership, Class Survey

December 22nd - The Power of the Incarnation

December 29th - Christmas Break

January 5th - Church Tour

January 12th - A message from Bishop Payne

January 19th - Missions & Ministry

January 26th - Class survey, questions, share spiritual treasure from the class

February 2nd – Confirmation, Reaffirmation, and Reception rehearsal

February 9th - Bishop's Visit and Confirmation, Reaffirmation, and Renewal of Baptismal Vows



### *Walk in Love: Stewardship 2025*

We are in the midst of stewardship season at Heavenly Rest when we invite you to consider your financial commitment to this place for the coming year. This year's theme is "Walk in Love," borrowed from the most frequently used offertory sentence at Heavenly Rest. This is not the only reason "Walk in Love" is a natural choice for a stewardship theme. At its heart, stewardship is about discerning how we are connected to the Church and one another. It is about ensuring that Heavenly Rest remains a place where people can show love to one another week in and week out. Stewardship is, in other words, about walking in love.



## Angel Tree: Be an angel and buy an Angel Tree gift!

– Amanda Watson

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who took an angel from our Angel Tree! This important ministry supports children with a parent in prison, bringing joy and gifts during the holiday season.

The Angel Tree is a project of the National Prison Fellowship. The incarcerated parent, unable to purchase Christmas gifts, completes a form including limited information about the child and a short personal note to the child as a recommendation for their children to participate in the program. The caregivers of their children are usually family members or friends. These caregivers generously accept these additional children even while being financially challenged themselves. The beauty and wonder of this program is that the members of Heavenly Rest will purchase the gifts, wrap these gifts, and place a note from the parent on each gift tag. We at Heavenly Rest are anonymous. On Christmas morning, these children will open gifts from their parents. What a glorious gift we can give the parent, the caregiver, and the children. It is a gift of family. It is a gift of love.

We have much to do before the caregivers receive our gifts. Please return unwrapped gifts to the tree or church office with the angel firmly attached by December 8th. The Daughters of the King will sort the gifts, verifying that each child will receive three gifts. Then, finally, on Wednesday, December 11th, our Wednesday night program will be a wrapping party beginning with supper at 6:00. The gifts will be distributed to the caregivers the following Friday and Saturday.

Advent is a time of anticipating the coming of love incarnate. What better way to anticipate that love than to imagine the unexpected, absolute joy, that huge smile, those sparkling eyes of those receiving a gift from a parent that perhaps the child thought impossible? Come, Lord Jesus, Come.



*The Angel Tree is set up in the cloister! Contact Mother Amanda at [awatson@heavenlyrestabilene.org](mailto:awatson@heavenlyrestabilene.org) for more information!*



# Advent and Christmas for Children and Families

– Carol Ann Weston

## Advent Prayer Stations

The season of Advent, which comes from the Latin word *adventus* meaning “coming” or “visit,” begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. During Advent, we prepare for and anticipate the coming of Christ. However, with so much busyness and activity during December, it can be difficult to make time to stop and prepare our hearts for the gift God gives us at Christmas.

Our Advent Prayer Stations will include two activity stations: making a family Advent Wreath for your home, with children making their own version, and making an Advent Storytelling Calendar. Other stations will invite you to pray and respond as you reflect on the nativity scene, angels, shepherds, and magi. There will also be a Quiet Space for young children to explore nativity sets, books, and puzzles.

These stations will be available in Gerhart Hall from December 1st through 22nd. (On Sundays, a class meets there from 9:00 – 10:15.) You are welcome to visit anytime the building is open or to stop by the office during the week, and a staff member will open it for you.

We have designed the Advent Prayer Stations with ALL ages in mind and for those with children to experience as a family. We hope that you will take part in this opportunity to prepare your heart for the coming of the Christ Child.

## Christmas Pageant and Party Sunday, December 15, beginning at 4:00

Through Scripture, movement, prayer, and song, our young people enable us to experience anew the coming of Christ in our annual Christmas Pageant. Our parish Christmas pageant is also a wonderful opportunity for children and youth to experience and remember the birth of Jesus by becoming immersed in the story. ALL children and youth who would like to participate are welcome, including first-time guests! The youth narrators and a few main characters will prepare in advance. Everyone else will choose their character when they arrive. ALL are welcome!

3:15 p.m. – Get Ready! Children and youth who want to participate in the pageant will meet upstairs in the Parish House to choose their characters and costumes, then move to the Nave for a walk-through.

4:00 p.m. - Christmas Pageant in the Nave

After the pageant, participants will go upstairs to remove their costumes. We ask families to pick their children up at the bottom of the main stairs in the Parish House.

4:30 p.m. - Parish Christmas Party and Visit from Santa - We will gather in Gerhart Hall for snacks, fellowship, and an opportunity to visit Santa.



# Advent & Christmas Music News

– Thomas Pavlechko, Organist & Director of Music

## Advent Hymns

This year’s Advent hymns are based on last year’s research regarding those that are most well-known, loved and sung at Heavenly Rest. This season adds a few more based on the scriptures for this liturgical Year C. As you prepare for the coming of the Lord, enjoy singing:

- 53 Once he came in blessing
- 54 Savior of the nations, come!
- 56 O come, O come, Emmanuel
- 57 Lo! He comes, with clouds descending
- 59 Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding
- 60 Creator of the stars of night
- 65 Prepare the way, O Zion
- 66 Come, thou long-expected Jesus
- 67 Comfort, comfort ye my people
- 68 Rejoice, rejoice, believers
- 69 What is the crying at the Jordan?
- 72 Hark! The glad sound!
- 73 The King shall come when morning dawns
- 74 Blest be the King whose coming
- 75 There’s a voice in the wilderness crying
- 76 On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry
- 438 Tell out my soul

Two new hymn texts will be introduced to you on Advent IV, both complimenting the Gospel text of Mary’s visit with her cousin Elizabeth. “Unexpected and mysterious,” is by Jeannette M. Lindholm and is included in the Lutheran Hymnal. We will sing it to the well-known tune Stuttgart which is also the tune for Hymn 66 Come thou long-expected Jesus.

“When to Mary, the Word” is a hymn text by my dear friend, Patricia Clark from Austin, to which I composed a tune which will be sung by the choir.

The Psalm settings will once again be based on the hymn tune Veni Emmanuel: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

## Christmas Eve & Day

The Christmas Eve service music at 4:00 p.m. will be led by the organ with carols that are family friendly.

The Festival of Lessons & Carols on Christmas Eve at 6:00 p.m. will feature carols sung by all. The selections are based on the traditions of King’s College, Cambridge, where the Festival was founded in 1918.

- 102 Once in Royal David’s City
- 60 Creator of the stars of night
- 82 Of the Father’s Love Begotten
- 98 Unto us a boy is born!
- 81 Lo, how a rose e’er blooming
- 265 The angel Gabriel
- 79 O little town of Bethlehem
- 94 While shepherds watched their flocks
- 112 In the bleak mid-winter
- 83 O come, all ye faithful
- 87 Hark! The herald angels sing

The 10:00 p.m. Service on Christmas Eve will be preceded by a musical prelude at 9:45 featuring the choir, organ and instrumental trio, including lovely carol arrangements by Herman Schroeder and Robert J. Powell. The offertory anthem will be “On Christmas Night” ‘Sussex Carol’ arranged by Philip Ledger, former choirmaster at King’s College, Cambridge.

The Christmas Day service music at 10:30 a.m. will be led by the organ with carols that are family friendly.



## 12th Night and the Eve of the Epiphany

– Amanda Watson

The twelve days of Christmas seem to come and go so suddenly, with no time to sing Christmas carols or extended time to celebrate. *Au contraire*, my dear, the Episcopal Church of the Heavenly Rest celebrates the twelve days of Christmas. On the 12th Night, we have a grand and holy night beginning with Eucharist in the nave at 5:30 pm, a procession down the sidewalk led by the pipers to the Grand Gerhart Hall decorated for a magnificent festive evening of food, fun, carol singing, magical string quartet and the chalking of the doors.

Come ye one and all. Come ye mater, pater and cilds (We welcome families!!) Come, ye ladies and knights, ye ladies and gentlemen, ye maids and bachelors, even come bard of writ and word and bring with thee the clergy most dour, if thou must. Each shall enter and receive a headdress most faire for the lass and most manly for the lad and begin the feaste with the fruit of the vine and tip ye hats to the fine day. Caution to all that the king has placed a wee little tax of \$12.00 per person and a tax of \$25.00 per family. The Grand Duke's baker, Robert Becerra, will prepare a feaste fit for a king and many an Anglican and, be forewarned, a Cathlik or two. A poor dear swine, bless his soul, has surrendered his life as fill for our empty stomokes served amid a garden of potatoes, beans and grain, for the bread, with sweet cakes to abound. More music and carols will lead us to welcome Epiphany with the magi's arrival. We will chalk our doors to welcome all who enter just as Mother Mary welcomed the magi into the presence of the King of Peace.

Come one, come all for a rollicking time to celebrate the coming of the Christ child; we welcome all who enter our doors to kneel and offer gifts of praise and thanksgiving for the newborn king.

The Feaste of the 12th Night and the Eve of the Epiphany  
Sunday, January 5, 2025

5:30 pm Holy Eucharist  
6:30 pm Procession lead by pipers to Gerhart Hall  
Feast – Music – Carols – Chalking of the Doors  
Tickets \$12.00 per person and \$25.00 per family

Reservations need to be made by December 31, 2024

For additional information, contact Mother Amanda Watson at 325-677-2091 or [awatson@heavenlyrestabilene.org](mailto:awatson@heavenlyrestabilene.org). For assistance in making a reservation for the Twelfth night dinner, contact Melody Brown at [mbrown@heavenlyrestabilene.org](mailto:mbrown@heavenlyrestabilene.org).



Scan the QR code to sign up  
for the 12th Night dinner!



## The Good News of Advent

– Doug Thomas, Priest in Residence

As followers of Christ, how are we preparing for Christmas? Like many people, we may decorate a tree, go shopping, wrap presents, and enjoy holiday music. But since we are Christians, we might also make it a point to set out one or more nativity scenes, listen to hymns and carols, and read the Christmas story as found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. We know, of course, that these activities may not prepare us for the coming of the Lord, but what else are we to do? I suggest we seek direction from the first few verses in the gospel of Mark.

Biblical scholars have determined that Mark was the first gospel to be written, and its authorship is dated to around 70 AD. Significantly, the Jews had begun a revolt against the Roman Empire in 66 AD, and Rome responded aggressively, so that, by the time this gospel was written, Jerusalem was under siege, and the Temple would soon be destroyed.

Perhaps this context explains why Mark is also the shortest of the gospels: time matters. People are being killed, and the flames of destruction are fast approaching. So, Mark writes with a sense of urgency. He doesn't spend time presenting a birth narrative with tales of wise men, angels, shepherds, and a manger. He jumps right in with a declaration of who Jesus is and begins his gospel, declaring: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Does it seem odd to you that Mark would write to a people whose city is under attack and whose futures are uncertain, claiming he brings "good news?" Not to me for two reasons. First, we need good news when we are most vulnerable and feel threatened. And second, because the source of the good news is not what we can do for ourselves, it is found in what God is doing for us. He has sent His Son. He has entered the turmoil of life in a brand new way. God has not abandoned us. We don't have to face our difficulties alone. God is with us – as Emmanuel.

That's the central message of all the gospels. Not that God will make all the bad things go away. But that He will be with us as we face them. And that through His Son, He has achieved the final victory over our greatest enemy – death. All we have to do – Mark says – was proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah and voiced by John the baptizer: "Prepare the way of the Lord" [1:3b]. So, how do we do that?

Here, I must confess that though I love the birth narratives found in Matthew and Luke, my soul is "lifted up" as I contemplate John's vision of the transcendent, eternal Christ. Mark's brief, stark story about John the Baptizer teaches us quickly what God requires of us to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the Lord.



Notice John “appeared in the wilderness.” That’s where the “people from the whole Judean countryside and ... the people of Jerusalem... [went to be] baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins...” [1:5]. They did not prepare themselves for the coming of the Lord while comfortably at home, productively at work, or any place where people gather to socialize and pursue their daily activities. They went to the wilderness to confess and receive the “baptism of repentance” [1:4].

Likewise, we do not prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord by engaging in culturally prescribed pursuits of the holiday season. Something else comes first. They went to the wilderness, so that is where we need to go.

Now, I don’t mean a physical wilderness, but rather, the wilderness of our hearts: the parts of ourselves and our lives that we have not yet let God cultivate: our unrepentant thoughts, recurring fears, shameful desires, and hidden actions.

Until we expose them—by confession and repentance—to the light of God’s love and forgiveness, they will grow in darkness, and we will not be ready for the coming of the Lord. And so, as we prepare to celebrate Christ’s first coming and anticipate his return, may God help us open the secrets of our hearts to the light of His Holy Spirit, that He may cleanse us of all unrighteousness and mold us to the image of His Son.

## Eucharistic Prayer B

– David Romanik

*Because you sent your beloved Son to redeem us from sin and death, and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.*

The Proper Preface for Advent, The Book of Common Prayer 1979, pg. 378

In many ways, the season of Advent is characterized by movement. The great prophecy of Isaiah 40 envisions the movement of God’s people from their place of exile to the Promised Land. The accounts of John the Baptist’s ministry describe the movement of people throughout Judea to the banks of the Jordan River. The story of the Nativity centers on the movement of the Holy Family toward the stable in Bethlehem.

As we begin the season of Advent at Heavenly Rest, we will begin using Eucharistic Prayer B (which begins on page 367 of the Book of Common Prayer) at the 10:30 service. There are several reasons for this change. In the first place, Advent begins the “Incarnation cycle” of the church year, which includes the seasons of Advent and Christmas, as well as Epiphany and the season that follows it. Eucharistic Prayer B is a particularly appropriate text for this cycle, because it makes explicit reference to the Incarnation several times, most notably right after the Sanctus: “We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us...in the Word made flesh: Jesus, your son.”

On a deeper level, however, Eucharistic Prayer B captures the movement at the heart of this season. This is particularly evident just before the words of institution, when the Celebrant says, “In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.” This prayer reminds us that we have been and are called to be transformed, moved from one state to another, because of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

As you participate in worship throughout the Incarnation cycle, think about the ways you can embrace the movement of this season, recognizing how God is calling you “out of” one state and “into” another.



## A Letter to Parson Gerhart from the Diocese of Northwest Texas

*At the end of October, Heavenly Rest hosted the 66th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Northwest Texas. At the conclusion of the Convention, the Reverend Mary Glover, Rector of St. Mark's in Abilene, offered a resolution thanking the people of Heavenly Rest for their efforts. The resolution included this letter to the Reverend Willis P. Gerhart, who served as Rector of Heavenly Rest from 1920 to 1958.*

Dear Parson Gerhart:

Hope this finds you..., well. A bunch of us just wanted to let you know that people - we called them clergy, delegates, spouses, guests, vendors- from every corner, cap rock, and canyon in the Diocese of Northwest Texas, rolled into town the other day, ready to get down to the business of Convention. Well, you know how it is, a little bit of business and lots of worship, greeting old friends and meeting new ones, learning some new things, legislating, oh, and eating. You know, a Diocese has gotta eat!

We just wanted you to know that it was your own parish that greeted us, hosted us, and made us feel welcome. And, on that promontory in central Abilene, in that not-so-little stone church - you remember, of course, the one you envisioned and then, by golly, got built - we managed to find plenty to eat: salads, tacos (beef and chicken!), cheesecake, guacamole, and brownies and cookies so plentiful you could "steal" them off other people's tables. For the meals, we especially wanted to thank Cheryl Holmes and Candy Scarborough. No, they didn't fix and serve them all by themselves... there were so, so many helpers and friendly faces all around the room and in the kitchen at this weekend's "Heavenly Restaurant."

We didn't see them much, but we also knew - because the whole place had been made ready for us - that the Sextons, Robert Becerra and Brandon Martin, were somewhere just around the corner, or back in the kitchen, or wandering the halls, shaking their heads at the messes we could make. But, they didn't complain and we're grateful for them and all they did to get the place ready and to make us comfortable.

You know, that fancy word "promontory" that I used for the West Texas hillside on Meander Street where the church is located? Learned that word in a workshop by your neighbor and local historian, Jay Moore, who had great stories about the Bishops that made sure we had a church in this neck of the woods (well, prairie), and about your unrelenting drive to build a place of worship and history and beauty dedicated to God right here in the middle of town. The bell tower got finished, by the way, in the 1980s, and there's a brand new

building where we met and ate and watched a great documentary about some girls that got ordained as priests in Philadelphia back in the '70s. I hope you would have liked the film. Oh, and did you know, they named that new building after you? Hope you would have liked that.

We had another workshop gathering in the old Parish Hall, which was built right where that dusty military quonset hut, where you led church for years when they were building the nave, used to sit. In that workshop, several of our friends from around the Diocese told about General Convention and the work and discoveries and simple joys that still define the life of the church. The Rector for Heavenly Rest, David Romanik - he's much taller than you ever thought of being, Parson - led off that workshop and he, ofcourse, made sure that we all gathered in the Nave several times to be nurtured by beautiful music and led by the Spirit in worship and praise. The organist and choirmaster, Thom Pavlechko, played us in and out and led the choir, and us, through an Evensong service that you would have loved. And, my oh my, you'd have gotten lost in the midst of all the acolytes and vergers and lay leaders and always faithful Altar Guild members that served during the services. Aren't they great?

Well, Parson, just like with that line of acolytes and choir members, we can't name everybody that worried and fretted, and hosted and helped, and cleaned and cooked this weekend, but we sure want to thank two people in particular, and want you to know you'd have been so impressed by their hospitality and graciousness (and perseverance, I'll bet) as they headed up the planning and carried it off with great style: Yvonne Batts and Judy Godfrey. I know you would have liked them.

Well, that's about all for now. Here's praying that the Spirit continue to fashion our lives according to the example of Jesus and grant that we may show the power of God's love to all among whom we live...

Shalom, Hasta Luego, and Uende Salama,  
Your friends from here and there in Northwest Texas

## Christmas at Heavenly Rest

### **Tuesday, December 24 - Christmas Eve**

4:00 p.m. - Holy Eucharist (Nave)

6:00 p.m. - Lessons and Carols (Nave)

10:00 p.m. - Festival Holy Eucharist (Nave)

### **Wednesday, December 25 - Christmas Day**

10:30 a.m. - Holy Eucharist (Nave)

1:00 p.m. - Holy Eucharist in Swahili (Nave)

### **Sunday, December 29 - First Sunday after Christmas**

8:00 am - Holy Eucharist Rite I (Nave)

10:30 am - Holy Eucharist Rite II (Nave)

1:00 p.m. - Morning Prayer in Swahili (Nave)

### **Monday, January 1 - Holy Name**

12:00 p.m. - Holy Eucharist (All Saints' Chapel)

### **Sunday, January 5 - Eve of the Epiphany**

8:00 am - Holy Eucharist Rite I (Nave)

10:30 am - Holy Eucharist Rite II (Nave)

1:00 pm - Worship in Swahili (Nave)

5:30 pm - Holy Eucharist for the Eve of the Epiphany (Nave)

6:30 pm - Twelfth Night Feaste (Gerhart Hall)



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