

Dear Companions on the Way...

Can you believe that Advent has arrived already? We now start another cycle of the church year and hopefully allow ourselves to be reminded of our deeper longing for God to reveal God's true self to us. Our culture will once again tempt us with messages of gratification and indulgence that perhaps are ways to distract us from the deeper longings we have. I love this season and don't want to drain the wonderful traditions and activities we embrace of their joy and energy, but I do want to urge us to keep the Christmas season centered in the amazing gift that God chooses to come to us and share our life with us.

Advent is about desire, isn't it? The goal of keeping Advent isn't to kill our desires but get to the deeper desires we rarely attend to. I've been giving much thought to the sermon that Kip Boyd gave the middle of November which focused on the issue of desire. (It is now posted on our website: stmarksdurango.com/sermonNovember15). He ended his offering (at 10:30 anyway) with a quote by C. S. Lewis that invites us to examine our desires – which seems entirely appropriate as we begin this Advent Season:

“If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is not part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

From *The Weight of Glory*

The classic Advent experience for me is the singing of the ancient hymn, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” Of all that we do in Advent, it sums up for me the main message of our Advent desire. But as I think about it, how do we get in touch with our heart's deepest desire? Singing is for me an experience where I feel my heart opened. And if nothing else, Advent is full of singing. There are caroling opportunities, concerts to attend, familiar Advent hymns at church, ecumenical services with lots of singing, singing Christmas songs and carols at home or at social gatherings.

See *Companions*, page 2

Companions *continued from page 1*

Let me invite you to consider the singing we do in Advent (or even listening to Christmas music) as opportunities for prayer. Imagine that the songs we sing are moments when we both ask God in and listen for God to speak to us. Pay attention to the words, but also pay attention to the feelings we have as we sing or listen. What carols or hymns touch us? Why? What are your old favorites? What new songs touch us? What old familiar carol touches you in a new way? As you hear a tune on a TV ad, can you remember the words? Can you in your mind reclaim the message of a tune back to a spiritual meaning when the advertisers have tried to co-opt it to sell you something that does not ultimately satisfy?

Singing is one of the most effective means I have to connect my head to my heart. Singing makes me feel human. I especially have enjoyed opportunities to sing major works, like the “Hallelujah Chorus,” for instance, that often seem to occur during the Advent season. When I sing with my full

attention, my body and breath fully engaged and I’m listening to the other singers and musicians trying to blend my voice to the music, I’ve sometimes felt transported and connected to something divine.

And that experience of being connected to the divine – Christmas declares – happens in the experience of our deepest humanity. So if singing doesn’t work for you, what makes you feel human? What is what makes you feel alive? awake in every part of your body and being? connected to the people around you? and perhaps part of something bigger than yourself? We sing at Christmas for Christ to “enter in, be born in us today” (O little town of Bethlehem, v.5), so let us all spend some time this Advent opening up the doors in our lives through which the holy child of Bethlehem may enter in. And enjoy this wonderful season!

Shalom,



Andrew

Calendar of Upcoming Events

December 1 . . . World AIDS Day Service

December 2 . . . Advent Ecumenical Services begin

December 4 . . . St. Mark’s day at
Manna Soup Kitchen

December 5 . . . St. Mark’s Annual
Community Christmas Bazaar

December 13 . . Photographs by Paul Boyer

December 13 . . Kids make Christmas cards

December 13 . . Mann/Hagler Christmas Recital

December 15 . . All-Church Caroling

December 21 . . Blue Christmas Service

December 24 . . Christmas Eve Services at
5:00, 7:00, 9:00 and 11:00

December 25 . . Merry Christmas! *No services*

World AIDS Day Service



A non-denominational service for World AIDS Day will be held at St. Mark's at 12:00 noon on Tuesday, December 1.

Advent Services and Soup Suppers

On December 2, the first in a series of ecumenical services followed by a soup supper will be at St. Columba. The series happens every Wednesday at 6:00 during the Advent season, with churches trading off hosting. Our turn to host is December 16. The schedule is as follows:

- December 2** – St. Columba, 1830 E. 2nd Ave.
- December 9** – 1st Presbyterian, 1159 E. 3rd Ave.
- December 16** – St. Mark's, 910 E. 3rd Ave.
- December 23** – Christ the King, 495 Florida Rd.

Since St. Mark's will host the gathering on December 16, we will need soups and breads for the soup supper that will follow the service. There is a sign-up sheet posted in the Parish Hall for those who would like to share their culinary talents by offering a delicious pot of soup or loaf of bread.

Kids! Come and Ring the Chimes

Children second grade and up are invited to ring chimes for the 5:00 p.m. service on Christmas Eve. We'll only rehearse four times (Tuesdays, December 1, 8, 15 and 22 at 4:00 p.m.) so we need a commitment to the rehearsals and performance. Please let Scott know in the church office, 247-1129, or by e-mail, ScottH@StMarksDurango.com.



Saturday, December 5
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Our annual Holiday Bazaar is December 5! We could still use some help with setting up tables on December 3, volunteers for the St. Mark's booth anytime on Saturday, as well as some help with cleaning up and breaking down tables at the end of the bazaar (2:45 p.m. until about 4:00 p.m. or earlier if there is lots of help). The Bazaar is one of our most successful fund-raisers each year.

If you are unable to help, you can still support the bazaar by dropping by St. Mark's between 9:00 a.m and 3:00 p.m. on December 5 and buying some cinnamon rolls or other home-made goodies. Come early if you want cinnamon rolls (they sell quickly!) There will also be chili available during lunch.

Member Photographs

Sunday, December 13, come dressed in your Sunday best and have your picture/family picture taken by St. Mark's own professional photographer parish-ioner (say that fast three times), Paul Boyer. The pictures will later be added to the member photo display in the Parish Hall and soon after we also hope to update the parish photo directory. You will also have the opportunity to order photographs from Paul.

Kids! Eat Pizza and Make Cards

Christmas card making and pizza! All pre-school children through middle school are invited to stay after church on Sunday, December 13 to decorate Christmas cards for the residents at Sunshine Gardens Retirement Center. Lunch will be served. Parents can plan on this activity taking no more than an hour after the 10:30 a.m. service. Please RSVP to Renée Knight at 259-6109.



Caroling at Sunshine Gardens

Mark your calendars! We'll gather at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 15 to carpool to Sunshine Gardens, sing some carols and spread some holiday cheer, then return to the church for a spaghetti supper. Please RSVP to Cheryl in the church office if you plan to join us for supper, so we know how many people to prepare to serve.



Blue Christmas Service: December 21

Many people experience sadness over the holidays. Loss of a loved one, children moving away, losing a job or a pet, divorce and the many changes that we struggle with, can all make this holiday time seem more like a burden than a joy.

The Blue Christmas service is a place to gather together and allow that sadness to be in a setting of remembrance, prayer and music. The service will take place at St. Mark's church on Monday, December 21 at 5:30 p.m.

Annual Christmas Gift of Music: December 13

Shelley Mann and Scott Hagler's annual Christmas recital is Sunday, December 13 at 2:00 p.m. Go out to lunch following the Sunday service then come back to the church to enjoy a variety of arrangements of Christmas music for flute, organ and piano. Scott and Shelley offer this special holiday concert every Christmas. Admission is free or you may offer a heart-felt donation.

Notes from the St. Mark's Library

Parish Read – There's some interest in a Parish Read the first of the year. If you would like to recommend a book you think the parish would like to read, send your ideas to Nellie at dgoduo@gmail.com.

Advent – Advent, the beginning of the church year, is a season when many St. Mark's parishioners choose a daily meditation. These minutes every day help to mute the cacophony of competing voices that threaten to anaesthetize our hearts and souls in December, stealing the transforming gift of Advent and Christmas without our notice. Our library houses a number of meditation books specifically for this season. In addition, our largest library category is labeled Reflections/Prayers/ Devotions. You may well find something in the St. Mark's library that speaks to you this December.

Parish Nurse and Caring Community Notes

By Lynn Emerson, Parish Nurse, RN, BSN

As I write this note, the sun is shining and most of the snow from our last storm has melted with our balmy temperatures. However, we all know the snow will come again!

In church last Sunday we noticed a few parishioners having difficulty getting to the altar for communion. If you are in this situation let the ushers know and they will alert the priest to bring communion to you in the pew. Along this same vein, If you are unable to get to church because of not feeling well, call the church office, 247-1129 or the church deacon, Ginny Brown at 385-5575, and they will try to arrange an LEV to bring communion to your home.

We also have parish volunteers (when available) for help with transportation to and from church, doctor's appointments, grocery store, etc. You may also call the church office to make transportation arrangements.

If you have a planned (such as with surgery) or emergent hospitalization and would appreciate a visit for anointing and/or prayer, a call to the church office will set the ball rolling to make that happen.

We pray for a healthy and safe winter season for everyone!

CHRISTMAS EVE 2009

Schedule of Services

Thursday, December 24

5:00 p.m.

Children's Christmas Pageant and Eucharist
(Childcare provided)

7:00 p.m.

Candlelight Choral Eucharist with Choir
(Childcare provided)

9:00 p.m.

Candlelight Choral Eucharist with Choir
(Childcare provided)

11:00 p.m.

The Midnight Mass of Christmas
(With incense. No choir or childcare)

Poet's Corner

Sacred Air

by Nicholas Samaras

Speak to me
about the presence of absence.

Not everything created
can be seen.

As the uncreated
may be glimpsed from a slant.

What we bring is attention –
prayer in our hands, spirit in our lungs.

Emptiness but a focus on what
borders and frames the space –

what the space is filled by.
Nothing empty

of the presence of the Lord.
Give pause between words.

A container saying,
Don't look at me, but look

at the space of me. Look through me
to what I contain. A bottle filled

with the air of the holy place,
a desert, a mountain, a space

of the Lord to apprehend and inhabit.
Breathe the sacred air.