



Serving Christ and the community since 1731.

rhinebeckreformed.org

| 845.876.3727

| 6368 Mill Street, Rhinebeck, NY 12572

| rhinebeckreformed@frontiernet.net

PASTORAL LETTER – DECEMBER 2020

Dear friend,

We find ourselves in the liturgical season known as Advent. It is the four weeks leading to Christmas Eve when we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth and for his second coming. Some of us prepare by wrapping our Christmas tree with lights, while others prepare by following an Advent calendar and lighting symbolic candles. Advent, therefore, is a season of the light. The light radiates and dares us to live with the expectant hope of better things to come.

Admittedly, it is challenging to believe that better things are going to come. We are dealing with a pandemic that is raging. We are grappling with the vestiges of racial and political polarization. We are facing the prospects of a sluggish economy. We are hurting from a loss. We are struggling with loneliness and isolation. Life in 2020 has made us feel like we are living under a perpetual, hopeless shadow.

Yet, as people of faith, we are encouraged to live with the heightened anticipation that the shadow is going to be lifted by the Nativity story and Christ's return. I suppose that one of the reasons the church refuses to leapfrog past Advent is because we need to be reminded that social problems cannot extinguish the light of Christ. Let us remember that Jesus was born into a dark and hopeless world that was ruled by an oppressive and violent Roman Empire. He was born in a world where Herod, the Roman-appointed governor of his region, targeted his life as an infant. He was born into a caste system where he was known as a *mamzer*, which means "forbidden child" in Hebrew. He was born in an uncomfortable manger as a seemingly homeless infant surrounded by wandering parents and livestock.

In spite of these dangers, stigmas, and challenges, the divine movement of God could not be stopped. Jesus was born. He came into this world, our world, to provide us with light for those moments in which life may feel discouraging and hopeless. If the circumstances unfolding during the time of Jesus could not stop his birth from taking place and his light from radiating, what makes you think that the circumstances of our present age will overshadow the light of Christ in you?

The Prophet Isaiah lived with the heightened expectation that the birth of Christ would represent a brighter future. He said, ***“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”*** One of the reasons that we, as the church of Christ, insist on observing Advent is because we want to re-read passages like the ones written by Isaiah. We need to be reminded of the ancient, but not outdated, words of our sacred tradition that God is involved in human history. To fully appreciate Isaiah's message, perhaps we need to slow down. I like what Bill McKibben said about changing our pace during the season of Advent. He said, ***“Advent: the time to listen for footsteps—you can't hear footsteps when you're running yourself.”***

Amid all of the human suffering, God is present. God is not indifferent to our pain, our plight. God has provided us with a light in the presence of Jesus. That light is in you. That light gives us clarity. That light gives us the hope to believe that something better, hopeful, and wonderful is going to arrive. After all, this is the meaning of Advent in Latin: ***“arrival.”***

Now that we have been reminded of the light that exists in us, may we allow that light to shine through in our words and deeds, so that others who are in need of the light may be drawn out of their darkness and into the hopeful message of Advent and Christmas: the Lord is coming. Something better is coming. Mother Teresa expressed my words more powerfully and beautifully when she said, ***“At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God's own love and concern.”***

May you have a blessed Advent and Christmas, and a Happy New Year!

Pastor Luis
