

Do So More And More

Finally, brothers and sisters, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more.”
-1st Thessalonians 4:1

Seasonal anticipation has already begun: Black Friday after US Thanksgiving is already the beginning of Christmas Shopping. The Church’s anticipation of the change of seasons has a somewhat smaller environmental footprint: we switch lectionaries from “Year A” to “Year B.” In Evangelical Lutheran Worship, you don’t even have to turn the page. “Year B Advent 1 F 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18.” (Page 1132, middle of the left side column, complementary with Psalm 80:1-7,17-19 and Zechariah 14:1-9, intended to focus on the Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent, Series B: Mark 13:24-37. The Holy Spirit promises always to bless your reading of God’s Word. If you don’t have a copy of ELW at home, you can order one on-line from Augsburg Fortress, or borrow one from the church. Just let our Administrative Assistant Kaylyn know you took one home. Our lectionary is also available on multiple Lutheran worship sites on-line: google Evangelical Lutheran Worship Daily Lectionary.)

Our seasonal anticipation has a considerably smaller viral load than the mad rush to the Big Box Stores too. Humble, gentle, peaceful apparently do not accurately describe the seasonal anticipation at Wal-Mart—although the associate who was assaulted yesterday may have many tales long in telling about “Christmas Shopping.” But those descriptors should apply to our seasonal anticipation because that’s the only kind that is fitting for the humble, gentle, peaceful coming of the King of Kings. Remember what the anticipation is leaning in to: a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and placed tenderly in a manger. Jesus himself spoke true when he pointed out that the wonder of the baby overcomes the anxiety of the pregnancy and the agony of the delivery. Just like there’s no other way to that moment, so there is no other way to a true Christmas. Even when we have to venture into a store this season, let’s do it humbly, gently, peacefully. That’s how we have been taught to live by hundreds of generations of our ancestors in faith. Yes, it matters if the last special gift is taken off the shelf before you get there to buy it: but disappointment is a special kind of gift too. And a much better one than some of the things we might unintentionally pick up or give away this season if we depart from the Lord’s humble, gentle, peaceful way....

Zion is not a big box church. Our Advent-Christmas Special Offering projects already say who we are loud and clear: ours is a sort of “downtown” anticipation, more than a bit worn, more than slightly overshadowed among the glittering glass giants, but warm with love and concern for our neighbour, our city, our world. And one of our concerns right now is that we learn again to celebrate a humble, gentle, peaceful Christmas that not only avoids contributing to the alarming spread of COVID-19 in our city, but also models what this seasonal anticipation is really all about. So we can’t gather in the church when the candle on the Advent Wreath is lighted? Make an advent wreath at home and light it together when its lit at the church. We can’t sing Christmas Carols together in the church? Sing them at home along with our

“designated singers” on Christmas Eve— participation options include YouTube, Facebook, phone, pre-delivered printed bulletins. And yes again, there will be a loneliness and a longing surrounding this season, itself already a gift of God’s boundless creativity making the whole world new. Humbly, gently, peacefully, God will get us through this, just watch. You’ll see. The whole world will see. That is what Advent is about.

Lorraine might have said it best. We visited while she was changing the altar paraments for Advent, using the story panels this year, so it takes a bit more care. We lamented together the loved ones who won’t be able to join us this year, and laughed at how shaggy we would look by Christmas. Then she said: “I just think about the soldiers who gave five years away from home during the war—surely we can manage eighteen months. What—six months before we have the vaccine? We can do this, even though we have never had to do anything like this before. With God’s help, we can do this.”

The Lord be with you.... Let us pray:

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection awaken us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and keep us blameless until the coming of your new day, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen