

## Newsletter Reflection for December

This month is the last month in the calendar year. At the same time it represents the beginning of the church year as we enter the season of Advent. If we are ones who attend church, most of the time we tend to view Advent through our lens of the past events primarily the birth of that Jewish boy in Bethlehem who grew up among us and changed the course of history. There is cause to celebrate that event for many reasons, but Jesus' presence in the world is not just an historical event. In the middle of the calendar year we rejoice in the way God's actions through Christ have offered to us the gift of a love we cannot understand: a gift which transforms our lives in the here and now. The season of Advent also celebrates the hope resident in the promise of Christ that he will come again. Too often we seem to get caught up in the ways the world views this season—not as a profound statement about God's love and a hope for all—but as a retail opportunity. The retail world began the "Christmas" season before the signs of Halloween and Thanksgiving had disappeared from their selves. Much to my dismay Starbucks has created and begun an ad campaign about their 2016 edition of their "Red" holiday cup. That cup became an issue last year. The "holiday" nature of the cup's design created such a media and social media uproar last year that it was ridiculous. I am not a Starbucks patron—not because of that—but because I rarely drink coffee and unless I am with my son, who is a regular patron of Starbucks—I would never consider purchasing their product no matter the color of the cup. Last year Tony, however, was aware that his cups were usually white. But on the day the media storm broke, he had in his possession a red cup from that morning's visit. What he was confused by—and disturbed by—was why the color of a cup from a secular retail outlet should be of concern to so many as a matter of faith. He couldn't understand either the outrage or the outrage over the outrage which sprang up. What does the color of a cup have to do with the meaning of the season—the celebration of God's gift and the promise that through the gift of that particular life we all have hope beyond this particular time and place? Since the terrorist attack of last November had also just occurred, this tempest over the color of a coffee cup seemed surreal. Tony framed this situation as standing at the intersection of the important (those things having to do with Christ's birth, the cross and resurrection) and the totally inane (those things without meaning). As we enter into Advent this year perhaps we should move away from that particular intersection and focus on the important things we know about Advent: about the *hope* we find in the good news brought to us all on that particular birthday; about the *peace* to be found by trusting in the promises made through the cross; about the *joy* to be found in a relationship with the Lord; about the *love* which bestowed such a gift in the person of Jesus the *Christ*. These are the images we mark during worship as we journey through this season with the lighting of the Advent Candles. In many ways we should not separate these two major seasons (Advent and Lent) within the life of the church for they are intertwined completely. The life begun on that day when the Advent Season ends with Christmas Eve and Morning steadfastly led to the cross on a hill outside Jerusalem and to the atoning sacrifice through which we are promised salvation by the resurrection. The entire story—the good news we have—is so much bigger than the color of a coffee cup—or any other

inane detail that we can use to distract ourselves from the really important story. My hope for this Advent season that we begin this journey with hope, find peace and joy, and learn to live into the love promised by both seasons of the church year. The poet Ann Weens published a collection of poems titled "Kneeling in Bethlehem". The following is one I find particularly apt as we enter the season and seek to find the child who awaits us.

### In Search Of Our Kneeling Places

In each heart lies a Bethlehem,

An inn where we must ultimately answer

Whether there is room or not.

When we are Bethlehem-bound

We experience our own advent in his.

When we are Bethlehem-bound

We can no longer look the other way

Conveniently not seeing stars

Not hearing angel voices.

We can no longer excuse ourselves by busily tending our sheep or our kingdoms.

This Advent let's go to Bethlehem

And see this thing that the Lord has made known to us.

In the midst of shopping sprees

Let's ponder in our hearts the Gift of Gifts.

Through the tinsel

Let's look for the gold of the Christmas Star.

In the excitement and confusion, in the merry chaos,

Let's look for the brush of angel's wings.

This Advent, let's go to Bethlehem and find our kneeling places.

Pastor Libby

