

## Newsletter Reflections for December

It comes as no surprise that the world has begun anticipating the Christmas season since the retail world has been displaying the trimmings needed for yards and trees since before Halloween; not to mention before we have had time to prepare our Thanksgiving menus much less prepare the meals and digest them as we give our thanks. However, the church also anticipates the arrival of the birth of that child—just not quite *that* early. The season of Advent is a season to anticipate and to prepare for that special birth; for the arrival of Emmanuel and just what that means in the lives of those who have just declared the previous Sunday that child who is coming is indeed the “King of Kings” and “Lord of Lord” as is the chorus from the Messiah also declares. Yet the man that child grew into is recorded to have refused to exert power in the accepted ways of the world. He declared himself to be a king unlike the kings of this world and also told those that who would follow him that they too were called to be different. In that difference of how power and kingship is approached and understood we can also see a reflection of the differences in how the world urges us to prepare for this date and how scripture and the gospel accounts lead us to prepare. In many ways, Christ the King Sunday is the response of the church to the world’s version of kingdom values. Christ the King Sunday is not one of the traditional ancient holy days of the church. Actually, it was introduced in response to the secularization of the Christmas season. It was begun in 1925, but not widely adopted until later. The first observances were on the last Sunday in October, but in 1969 it was moved to the last Sunday of the liturgical year to form a bridge to Advent. This placement is meant to balance all the secular emphasis in the culture around us as we move toward this most important celebration within the church. The tying of that other major event in the life of the church—the season of Lent and Christ’s Passion, the Resurrection and Ascension—to the celebration of the Jewish Passover means that these two seasons are often close together. There are many days of what are called Ordinal times (commonly called Ordinary Times) between them. So as the time of celebration nears, it is easy to get caught up in the excitement of this very special birthday party which the world invites us to have. By having a focus on the kingship of Christ; on how he defined that kingship, just as we begin to prepare for the arrival into this still broken world can help us balance both aspects of our lives. We can enjoy the sheer joy of the season; the celebrations and the occasions which emphasize the spirit of caring and giving...especially when done in the service of others. In this modern society avoidance of the secular, hectic bombardment of advertisement does not seem to be a possible option. However, remembering that even in this secular world, our Lord is still king can allow us to dim the noise, to quite the effect of the clamor upon us and see where Christ is moving even among the brokenness with possibilities of service for us to offer in his name. Advent for the church is symbolized in several ways, often by the use of an Advent wreath which forms a circle of candles around a central candle. Each week a candle on the outer circle is lit until on Christmas Eve, that central candle representing Christ is lit. The circle represents the eternal, never ending aspect of God, of God’s love from which the symbols represented by the four candles arise as does Christ himself. Advent, like Lent, is meant to be a time to pray, to prepare to

receive that child into your heart and life, to repent of the ways in which your life has left the path you have been shown through the teachings of the man that child became. The first week, the candle of hope is lit and the words of the prophets of old are recounted who spoke of a light which would shine in darkness. We still need to hear these words and to focus on them today. The second week, the emphasis is on the promise of peace which the presence of Christ within can bring even in the midst of turmoil and chaos of the world. The season of Advent has much to offer to us if we keep in mind the declaration we just made that Christ is King, and we spend these weeks taking some time away from the hustle and bustle of the world's approach to Christmas morn and ponder those things of Advent. I hope that the Advent devotional also available to you in this newsletter will help with this as well.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby