

EXPLORING OUR FAITH

A Walk Through the Sunday Service Session 12 – The Sanctification of Time: the Church Year

This is an installment in a series, adapted from notes in the Sunday bulletins at St. Andrew's, that is exploring our Sunday worship. What we do. How and why we do it. History, theology, the way worship connects us with the mystery of God in Jesus Christ. Questions and comments are welcome.

The sanctification of time. This morning's cover note steps back a bit from our examination of the steps in the Sunday Eucharist, to look at something that frames and gives context to our Sunday by Sunday worship: the cycle of the Christian calendar. Today is a timely occasion to take that step back because it marks the transition from green vestments to blue, from the long half of the year marked by Sundays after Pentecost, to the half of the year centered around defining events in the life of Jesus: is birth at Christmas, his baptism at Epiphany, his death and resurrection at Easter. Advent is the season of preparation for the second coming of Christ at the Eschaton or End of Time, and in that connection for celebration of his first coming in a stable in Bethlehem. By sanctification of time, we don't mean some sort of "church-ifying." Rather, is about giving meaning to what would otherwise be simply a meaningless "the one who dies with the most toys wins" secular existence. Christianity, like its parent Judaism, is a religion centered on the God-givenness of history, on the embrace of creation and life, not escape from it. We recall the events in the life of Jesus in this new half of the calendar not to replay them in some sort of antiquarian exercise, but to bring them forward so they give meaning to our lives and the world here and now.

A particular look at Advent. Let's take a particular look at how Advent gives meaning to our lives today. In the secular world, the next four weeks are centered pretty much on shopping and manufactured merriment, on a sometimes frenetic celebration of our commercialized consumer culture and an idealization of "family life." But the Scripture readings today tell us something different: to prepare for the advent (which means coming) of something of cosmic significance –something of God's doing, not ours. Next Sunday and the Sunday following we meet the central player in the Advent drama, who is not Baby Jesus but John the Baptist. Only with the fourth Sunday do we get to Mary and Joseph and the quiet drama occurring at the margins of the bustle and tumult of worldly self-importance. We are at a moment in history when the threats of climate crisis, nuclear war, autocracy and more loom before us. Advent rcalls us to worship a God who is present through all of this, to the importance of holding steady to his promises, to resanctifying our lives in his truth. We are invited by today's blue vestments to step away from the secular world's values and explore again the holiness of time centered around Christ.