

Dear members and friends of our parish family,

The coming week marks both end and beginning with the celebration of the Fourth Sunday of Advent at our 10am Eucharist and then, later in the afternoon at 4pm, we welcome the baby Jesus with a joyous Christmas Eve Eucharist. Finally, on Christmas morning we continue our welcome of Christ being born into the world with a 10am Eucharist. For the past two Sundays, the Gospel passages have focused on John the Baptist. As a prophet John witnessed to the Word. On the Fourth Sunday of Advent (10am), this witness becomes a reality as Mary receives and consents to the presence of the Word at the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38). As the passage begins, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, a betrothed young woman in the small Galilean village of Nazareth. When the angel greets her Mary is at first frightened but the angel tells her to not be afraid. He then delivers to her the startling message that she has been chosen by God to bear a child who will be named Jesus, which means in Aramaic "God saves."

Although the Annunciation was an event that occurred at a particular time in history it continues to speak to us today as a reminder of God's grace and mercy. As an invitation to faith, it announces the continuing presence of Christ in our lives and we see in it the unfolding of the Incarnation in this final day of Advent. Deacon Mary Carol will preach. The story of Jesus' birth continues in our Christmas Eve Gospel (Luke 2:1-14). Joseph and Mary have travelled to Bethlehem to be registered for a kind of census. It is here that Jesus is born, in manger for there is no room for them at the inn. Following Jesus' birth, an angel appears to some shepherds in a region nearby as they tend their sheep and announces to them that the Messiah has been born in Bethlehem. Upon delivering the good news the angel is joined by a great multitude offering praise to God. The praise offered, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on Earth peace among those he favors" finds expression in our liturgy as the hymn of praise (Gloria in Excelsis Deo) that we sing following the Collect for Purity near the beginning of each Eucharist. The Gospel is complemented by our Epistle (Titus 2:11-14) which explains salvation in Christ as both a present and future event: in the future Christ will come again to claim us as his own but in the present we live in a changed world because Christ gave himself to redeem us from sin. In Christ's offering of himself we are called to respond, to live as "a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds."

On Christmas morning we continue our celebration with the Gospel of John (John 1:1-14) and it's glorious opening verse: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The reading speaks to Christ in both his cosmic and his historical manifestations and was highly significant in the development of our understanding of the Trinity. Our readings are rounded out with Paul's Letter to the Hebrews (1:1-4) and the Prophet Isaiah (52:7-10). Both offer the promise of salvation and in Paul's letter we understand the long-awaited fulfillment of that promise in the person of Jesus. I look forward to further exploring these texts as we join together Christmas Eve and Christmas morning in glorious celebration and thanksgiving for what God has done for us.

Finally, I want to take a moment to commend to you all the opportunity engage your participation in the Body of Christ in an important ministry. As we near our annual meeting (January 21, 2018) I invite you to consider the possibility of serving on the parish vestry. This is a serious commitment but its rewards are significant in that it offers the opportunity to further explore the many ways in which we live out our ministries as disciples. Our gifts as the Body of Christ are many and varied and no specific experience is required to take on this ministry. I ask that you all seriously discern if you might be called to serve in a leadership role within the parish as we enter a new chapter in our life together. Please speak to me or one of wardens if you feel so called.

Faithfully,
John+