

WHAT GOOD NEWS IS BEGINNING IN YOU?

Wild God of the wastes, whose gospel begins with a cry and a summons: take us to a pathless place where we can start again to taste creation's gifts anew and await the Spirit's touch; through Jesus Christ, the one who is to come.

A Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent, Prayers for An Inclusive Church

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

December 10, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MARK 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In the gospel reading today we hear the beginning of Mark's story about the good news of Jesus Christ.

In Mark's story, the beginning has no journey of Mary and Joseph, no night in Bethlehem, no inn that is too full, no birth of God in a stable. There is nothing here of shepherds and angels or a star....

In Mark's story there is a voice crying out in the wilderness

and people leaving their settled, comfortable homes and routines for the margins, the outskirts, the space beyond the familiar, the safe, the known.

And there they can hear that there is more to come, another larger embrace "of one who is more powerful than I," one, John said, who "is coming after me," and also coming: a gift of sacred spirit for the people of earth.

That's the beginning of

Mark's story of the good news.

And the question for all of us, today in December of 2017, is what story of good news is beginning in us?

In Advent and soon in Christmas we hear again stories that are familiar and that are given to us. They are given to us not to be fixed, static knowledge of the past, details to remember, but to awaken us to all that is possible in every moment of our lives.

To hear again the message of John the Baptist or the angels is not to bow down at a shrine to something that happened a long time ago, to pretend that we are awaiting a baby who was born 2000 years ago, but to enter into reality that is our own reality, reality that is yours, mine and ours – and everyone's – the fullness of divine life present now and in each moment.

The message is not exclusively Christian because nothing Christian is exclusive – even Christmas.... it is meant for the whole world.

Fr. Richard Rohr says of Advent: "We're in fact welcoming the Universal Christ, the Cosmic Christ, the Christ who is for ever being born in the human soul and into history."

In this moment. And this one. And this one: Christ is newly present in you, in me, in the

creation, in all aspects of our being, in all we have, all we have lost, all we know, all we experience, all we fear, all we hope for, all of our action, what we *do*, all that frustrates or burdens us, in all that frees us, enlivens and empowers us, in our relationships, our friendships that are not mere pastimes, social conventions, but expressions of holy community, vibrant elements of the fabric of the world (not mere "population").

There is an irony for us in this part of the world today hearing the lesson from Second Peter with its various references to all that will be "will be dissolved with fire." Don't we know it? Can't we see it as we are hearing this reading under the orange sun in an orange fire sky? Maybe better than others in other places, we can hear the depth of the old folk saying: "My barn having burned to the ground, now I can see the moon."

So what are you seeing? What are we seeing this Advent?

Fr. Richard recently spoke about St. Francis of Assisi's love of Christmas and that St. Francis had a great influence on the celebration of Christmas that was not popular in the church until around the 13th century and, we may recall, was prohibited by Puritan sects in America until well into the 19th century.

But St. Francis liked the

practice of putting lights (presumably candles) on trees at Christmas “to show that trees are filled with light anyway.” Maybe we can have a practice this Christmas in turning on or seeing the lights on a Christmas tree reminding us that trees are always filled with light....

And that is the Advent we are living and the Christmas we will celebrate. This is the gift of Jesus coming to the world and the gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit: that we will see the sacred, the light, in ourselves and in all and that we will see that all is sacred, that there you are filled with light, that our dark world is not *essentially* dark, that the dark times of our own lives are, perhaps at a depth we can't yet perceive, shining forth with light, that we all have stories of good news beginning, ready to be told

here and now, today, and not alone, but intertwined, intermingled with *all* the stories of good news arising in each of us now.

Ultimately, and essentially, the light, the story, the good news is compassion for all people, for every aspect of the created order, for children, women, men, animals, plant life, the deserts, valleys, mountains, the rough places, even the rocks are crying out, radiating the undying love of God.

What do you need for Christmas?

Simply this beginning, *this* beginning, and *this* one. *This* story of good news that is beginning now, that is beginning again and again in your life, and yes, in the life of *this* whole world.



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