

Christ Church

Good News and Notes

* Please note that all new items for this edition are in red

Repent! Finding Our Way Home Again

On the second Sunday of Advent, the Word of God is announced to us as it is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah and fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist. Long ago as the Israelites languished in exile, God declared:

"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'." In other words, God sends his prophet and says, "Tell them I'm coming to bring them home."

As Christians, we are familiar with this message, "Prepare the way of the Lord," because it is the central message of John the Baptist. John the Baptist is the prophet whom God has sent to set the stage for the coming of Jesus as the one who leads us home to God. Jesus, John says, is the One who will lead us once and for all, if we want to follow, into God's mercy, joy, and forgiveness.

The prophecy of Isaiah promises a new action of God, who will make a victorious way through the wilderness to bring his tired and troubled people home from exile; in Sunday's gospel, this new prophet, John, begins by pointing us toward Jesus as that way.

Our culture often speaks of fulfillment as coming from power and acquisition. John speaks of fulfillment as coming only from God and repentance and forgiveness as the very foundation of true and unassailable joy.

John reminds us that we are lost if we remain rooted in dead end attitudes and behaviors, and that we are found when we decide to admit that we're lost and turn around to move in a new direction, a new direction that leads us straight toward the heart of God.

The word *repent*, at least for me, often recalls the cartoonish images of fire and brimstone preachers exhorting us to change our ways before we're consigned to the eternal hot burning "flames of hell-fire."

But 'to repent' simply means to change our mind, wake up, to see a new way, a new hope that calls us to turn away from self-inflicted pain and move toward something new.

Repentance is a movement from punishing resignation into hopeful expectancy. God does not want us to dwell in darkness and guilt. Nothing we have done or failed to do can defeat the beginning of the Good News. The beginning of the Good News in Mark's gospel heralds the *defeat* of darkness. In Christ, the Light has come.

In Sunday's Psalm we will hear the words: "Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." The words of this Psalm resonate with the true nature of repentance and the sweetness of forgiveness.

Repentance and forgiveness are gifts from God that offer transformation and new life. This transformation occurs only when we examine the whole unvarnished truth of our lives and give ourselves over to God's mercy for healing from all that robs our joy.

This is precisely how mercy and truth meet---when we stand vulnerable and unafraid before God and say, "We're lost, bring us home. Repentance, or put another way, turning away from hopelessness, finds us letting go of doubt, fear, anger, pride, greed, lust, or anything else that seeks to enslave us.

God's forgiveness comes as release, release from old prisons and old debts. This is what Jesus means when he teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." The mercy of God is so great that there is NO dead-end choice that can't be forgiven, if that is what we desire.

Choosing to stay locked and lost in guilt, shame or anger keeps us indebted when God yearns to wipe the debt clean and set us free.

John points us clearly to the coming of Christ and does all he can to deliver the message that God is once again calling us home. God is calling us home from wherever we find ourselves exiled or dead-ended.

God is calling us home from the wilderness of fear, doubt, mistrust, hopelessness or pride; we find hopefulness in knowing God still cares about the world. The mood of Advent is anticipatory. We are given a call to action, a call claims our participation in bringing God's mercy, justice and peace on the earth.

Advent is a time of waiting, hoping, and *doing*. Advent is a time for anticipating the sweetness of seeing our lives and our world in a whole new light. It is accepting the invitation to start over, fresh like a newborn.

What is it in your life that holds you captive? What wholeness would you like to claim for yourselves so that you might live the life you love. Which dream should you no longer postpone? Advent invites us to stop wasting our lives on fear and love one another for all that we are worth.

Or as Isaiah tells us:

*Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"*

Happy Advent, Stephanie+

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Advent Worship Notes: Something New Ahead!

We are now in the Holy season of Advent. This is a season in which we trust that we stand on the brink of something new. Advent is a season of deep longing. It is a time when our longing for God's mercy, love, justice and compassion is wed to our expectation that God does break into history and invite us to awaken from our numbed endurance and domesticated expectations. It is the time to consider our lives afresh in light of the new gifts God is about to give.

Our liturgy for these Sundays in Advent echoes that longing and features a Eucharist Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer Supplement called Enriching our Worship. It will be familiar to some from other settings.

Called EOW for short, this resource was approved for use many years ago and its Eucharist prayers echo the ancient and early liturgies (4th and 5th centuries) of the Christian Church, which focused on the goodness and mercy of God,

This particular Eucharist prayer resonates with the themes of Advent and I invite you to listen closely to how it captures our story of God's saving help and how Advent reminds us God is always doing something new.

In addition, we are offering prayers at the lighting of the Advent wreath, and the Prayers of the People are also imbedded with the longing and preparation for God to break into this world.

And something else to notice is that we do not sing the Gloria during Advent. Advent, sometimes incorrectly confused with Lenten themes, is meant to be a season of joy and expectation so we do omit the Gloria because of its joyful note, but we omit it during this season so that on Christmas Eve night,

we burst forth in joyful song with that Angel's Choir as they announce the wondrous birth of the Christ child! The Gloria's absence in these next four weeks refreshes our memory of the true wonder that the hymn announces.

In addition, for the season of Advent, we will speak the Creed. This is less a thematic decision, but so that those who prefer to speak it instead of sing it can have that opportunity again. We will return the sung Creed in other seasons, but variety is the spice of life so a season of speaking it is a good thing too.

And, we are once again highlighting the Advent season themes on our worship booklet cover. The beautiful, seasonal images of this lovely church will return—they are a treasure.

And remember, I always welcome your questions and wonderings and sincerely wish you to share any questions or dissatisfaction with me directly. My intent as a Liturgist is simply to be a gentle curator of the wide and vast resources in our beautiful liturgical tradition and engage with you on the wideness of our beautiful tradition.

My deepest hope is that we will allow our Advent worship to create that rare opportunity in our ever-busy lives to simply be still in the presence of God and let our worship sink deep into the flesh and bones of our being.

I hope you will join me for the Advent series "Vulnerability and Faith" in the Parish Hall at 9:15 on Sundays and that you will come and take a break from the stress and demands that often mark this season for many. Come to worship on Sundays and allow yourselves the gift of remembering that we are made for joy and communion with God that transcends all of the ways this life can make us crazy.

And finally, I invite you to keep in mind this Advent a wise saying from Thomas Merton:

"The Advent mystery is the beginning of the end
of all in us that is not yet Christ."

During this time of demand, longing and expectation, may we be gentle with all whom we love and offer kindness to ourselves.

Happy Advent, Stephanie+

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The Bishop is Coming!

Bishop José will be joining us on Sunday, March 18th. If you are interested in **Confirmation, Reception, or if you would like to Reaffirm the covenant you made at Confirmation**, please contact Stephanie at revsteph@skybest.net.

There will be preparation classes for these sacred and wonderful events beginning Sunday, February 4th. Look for more information coming soon!

Blessings, Stephanie+

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Ministerium Community Advent Lunches at Sparta Methodist!

Join with members of the Allegheny community every Wednesday through Advent at 12 Noon at Sparta UMC. Enjoy a short worship service followed by a soup and sandwich luncheon.

Next Wednesday, the 13th, our own Rev. Stephanie will be offering the message. Please come out and support her and enjoy a slice of Advent peace in the middle of your busy week.

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Thank you! We anticipate a few more pledges to come in through the new year, but your generosity is already showing! Pledges have increased, and new pledgers are now on the rolls. If you haven't made a pledge and would like to do so, pledge cards are located on the lectern as you enter the sanctuary.

Christ Church is full of abundant hope for our life and mission together. The numbers are telling us that we are on fire with God's life and love. God's Abundant Life is breaking out all around us!

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Members Needed!

We're looking for Parish members willing to serve a three-year term on the Vestry Committee (2018-2022). We have two openings and elections will be held at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 21, 2018.

We also need two volunteers to serve as delegates and two more volunteers to serve as alternates to the Episcopal Diocese of WNC Convention in November 2018.

Please contact Phil Donaldson to learn more about these exciting opportunities and/or to communicate your willingness to serve in either capacity. Phil can be reached at 336.372.7573 or at sld1400@aol.com.

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Out of Office

I will be out of the office on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday of next week. **We will worship on Wednesday at our regular time.** In case of pastoral emergency, please call the emergency line at (336) 363-4141. Mary will be available to assist you with any administrative needs.

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Here's a way to help people in our community as the holiday season begins:

Food Closet Needs

The Solid Rock Food Closet currently needs the items listed below. Any help you can give will be greatly appreciated!

shelf-stable milk
peanut butter
frozen veggie packs
dry pintos
canned fruit (applesauce, peaches, etc.)
raisins
hotdogs (they do NOT need buns)
white rice

ALSO, personal care items:

soap
shampoo
feminine hygiene products
razors
toothbrushes

toothpaste

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**Mountain Soul presents:
Puddingstone Christmas Concert this Sunday,
December 10 at 6:00pm!**



Our name reflects us perfectly – *Puddingstone* is a conglomerate of many different stones. The genres we play range from Americana such as fife and drum, Celtic, folk, New Age, Flamenco, Renaissance as well as some classical. What makes a Puddingstone arrangement recognizable is their unique sound.

We have a dazzling array of ancient and modern instruments including hurdy-gurdy, gemshorns, & viola de gamba as well as electronic wind machines and drum sets. The combination of the ancient and acoustic instruments with the electronic instruments is what gives us our signature sound.

We have been hailed as the "best-kept secret in North Carolina". Our members all have professions that are additional to being musicians. Our professions include physician, teachers, and business owners.

We have a very loyal following in North Carolina and are looking to expand our presence throughout the southeast. We are proud to have been featured in *Our State* magazine several times. In 2012 we were asked to play at Pinehurst for their *Taste of North Carolina* weekend. We performed in July 2007 as the kick-off group for the *Best of Our State* weekend. We were also

featured on their events calendar with a photo in the March 2008 edition to promote our Luck 'o the Irish concert March 15 which featured the St. Joseph's Irish Dancers. Many people remember our Christmas concerts at Old Salem which drew audiences for over 20 years.

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An Emergency Contact Opportunity

We've had a request to create an emergency contact for any interested parishioners. In keeping with this idea, we'll ask that you send a name/phone number to ccepiscopeal@skybest.com along with instructions about when that person should be contacted. This information will be added to your ACS electronic file. Why would you need to share an emergency contact? If you live alone or your family members live at a distance, it can be reassuring to know that in the event of an emergency, someone you've identified can be contacted. This is not required but available if you'd like to take advantage of it.

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Neighborhood Bible Study

A Neighborhood Bible Study on the Letters (Epistles) of John began on Thursday the 28th of September and continues every other week at 6:00pm at the Seckel Barn, 404 Vestal Road, and is led by Rev. Martha Honaker. We will gather every other week at 6 pm, and end at 7:45 pm. **The last 2017 session will be next Thursday, December 14th.** We look forward to you joining us!

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If you have any questions regarding anything building or grounds related, please contact Phil Donaldson or Willie Plummer with your concern.

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Women's Fellowship

Friends in Faith meets on Wednesdays at 11:00. We gather as sisters in Christ to praise, pray, study, and share our lives. Please join us!

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For Urgent Prayer Request – Contact Gary Medley. Please be sure to get permission to share any details for the Prayers. Also, if you like to be listed as an Urgent Prayer Partner, please let Gary know.

Great thanks & peace, Gary Medley
gapdweller@gmail.com
336.372.7464 or 336.572.2905

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As a reminder, if you have news & notes for the GN&N OR announcements you want posted in the bulletin OR new prayer requests, please email them to me at ccepiscopal@skybest.com or call the office at 336.372.7983. DEADLINE is Wednesdays by noon. Blessings!

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Mark Your Calendars

Thursday, December 7

12:30pm – Vestry Committee meeting

Sunday, December 10 – the Second Sunday of Advent

9:15am – Adult Forum

10:30am – Holy Eucharist

6:00pm - Mountain Soul presents the Puddingstone Christmas Concert

Wednesday, December 13

10:00am – Holy Eucharist

11:00am – Christ Church Friends in Faith

12:00pm – Ministerium Community Advent Service/Lunch at Sparta Methodist Church; Rev. Stephanie will be speaking

Thursday, December 14

6:00pm – Neighborhood Bible Study: The Letters of John; Seckel Barn, 404 Vestal Road, Sparta

Sunday, December 17 – the Third Sunday of Advent

9:15am – Adult Forum

10:30am – Holy Eucharist

Wednesday, December 20

10:00am – Holy Eucharist

NO Christ Church Friends in Faith today

Sunday, December 24 – the Fourth Sunday of Advent/Christmas Eve

9:15am – Adult Forum

10:30am – Holy Eucharist

9:00pm – Christmas Eve service

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**Prayer requests from the staff and prisoners
River North Correctional Center, Independence, VA**

Pray for revival and blessings for this country and its leaders. -CB

Pray for everyone who needs the Lord's grace in their lives today.

I would like to keep those brothers over in other countries lifted up in prayers. -RJ

Pray for my family.

Pray that I am able to get a favorable resentencing hearing and be able to go home to the woman I love. Pray for peace on earth and that my mother-in-law can feel the healing hand of our wonderful Lord. -BB

Pray for the men and women serving overseas fighting for our country. Pray for my family. -CD

Pray for my son as he has gone missing and is struggling with addiction. Pray that God lays His hand upon him. Guide him home and release him from the chains of addiction. Pray for the vets and men and women in prisons around the world. -NW

Pray for my father who is legally blind, lives alone and needs some support physically and mentally. -JJ

Pray for me and my three sons. Pray for my family, RN church, and guests. Pray for the world. May God bless us all. Whatever God does is best. Stay prayed up. Love always. -SC

Lord, thank you. Amen. -AN

Thank you. Pray for my family and friends and this church. Bless all my brothers and sisters in Christ. -KG

Jesus, bless the whole world and touch my heart and soul. -LW

I want to thank the Lord Jesus for all the heavenly gifts that He has bestowed on each of us. I pray that he will open up the storehouses of heaven for each and every soul that calls on Him and that they turn to Him with a pure heart. -DP

I want you to pray for me to have the diligence to complete my college education in accordance to the spirit of God and His faithfulness. Pray that

during that time I grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. Pray for the Lord to be in my life.

Thank you church for praying for me and my family. I am 50 years old today. The Lord has blest me on this day to still be alive. I pray I live another 50. Amen. -RH

Jesus I just want to say this – That I love You with all my heart, soul, and mind. -LW

Pray for all the Christians here in this service and for everybody here to be blessed with the real meaning of Christmas. In the name of Jesus.

Lord thank You for everything that You do for all of us. Thank You for Your blessings and for a new day of life. I pray for all my family that they be healthy and for a blessing in the name of Jesus. Amen. -RJ

I pray for the body of Christ to be in zeal for God red hot for His power. We believers of Christ need to experience the manifestation of His spirit. I pray every family that fears God is protected. I pray for divine healing to spring forth. -JF

Pray for my two sons, my family, my brothers and sisters in Christ and for the ones who are not saved. Pray for me and the situation I am going through right now. -DR

Lift up this nation to stand & acknowledge truth and know woe unto them that call evil good and good evil. Truth is light. -HB

Pray for my friend. He has cancer. But with your prayer and the grace of God he will be healed. -HS

Stand with me in faith that the Lord is making a way for me & that the Lord is blessing the health of my mother & siblings. -JS

Pray for everyone praying for the 40 days. May God bless them as a result of their faithfulness. Bless the men of God here at RN that proclaim the name of Christ that they would recognize God in everything and everyone.

Thanks for everyone who come from the outside. Keep me in your prayers for my health is not good. Pray for all this holiday season. God bless. -GT

I thank God for my life and his promises of mercy and grace over my life.

Thank God for grace, mercy, and forgiveness for us and all of our families and loved ones.

Thank You Jesus for life. -GS

I love You God for allowing this church to worship and praise You and give You the glory for how You continue to bless me and RN. Amen. -PP

Thanks for God being in my life and pray that He will come to each and everyone who prays in His name. -GP

Pray for me, my family to be safe during this holiday season.

Pray for my special friend that he is doing okay and feeling well. Pray that we will see each other soon and be back together. -CF

Pray for my wife and I to be back together soon and that we can see each other soon. Pray for our families and loved ones. Have a happy and safe holidays. Remember we should remember Jesus' birthday just like we do our own and others. -JF

Pray for my children, my mother, my grandkids, my siblings. Pray that the Lord blesses me with wisdom, guidance, and the strength to be humble. -FH

Pray for my children, grandchildren, and brothers. Pray for my mother, father, and my spiritual awakening -KS

Pray for my spiritual growth and my leadership of my family. -DJ

Pray for us all, for our families, friends, enemies, our volunteers, their families, and all those who keep us in prayer. Pray for salvation for all those who are non-believers. Amen. -KD

Pray for all of us. Pray for our family, enemies, and friends. Pray for the sick and the homeless. Pray for me. Pray that this world gets better and follows the Lord. Amen. -SP

Pray for my family and friends. Pray for the church of God, the flocks of Christ both in RN and worldwide. Pray for health and well-being of all and for safety and understanding in Christ Jesus. Pray for unbelievers to find Christ. -JM

Lord, I thank You for waking me up this morning. Pray for my family and my kids. Pray for all my loved ones and friends; everyone in RN and all over the country. Pray for all my brothers and sisters in Christ. -LW

Thank God for God's unconditional love, grace, and mercy that God has showered on me and my loved ones. I ask the God renews my mind and strengthen my spirit.

I pray for this church in the name of Jesus Christ.

May the Holy Spirit rain down from heaven on all mankind. -AS

Pray for my family. -TH

I pray for me, my family's friends and for all that are in prison.

Pray for my family and for me to have a better life. -KL

I would like for the church to pray for my safety to and from church service. I pray for my enemies that God will open their eyes to the light. -PS

Pray for my family and friends and that my grandpa's surgery goes well and that I stay on the right path and follow Your Word. -DF

Pray for my family and all the brothers in Christ and their families. -DA

God bless everyone who prays for us. May God's peace be upon you and your family.

Pido oracion para toda mi familia por problemas de salud y union. -V