



SAINT LUKE'S

ADVENT 4
YEAR A

ISAIAH 7:10-16
ROMANS 1:1-7
MATTHEW 1:18-25
PSALM 80:1-7, 16-18

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN

DECEMBER 18, 2016



In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. As a Church and hopefully as individuals, we have been watching, awake and alert, for Jesus. Advent is the time when we are called to make ready our hearts and our homes for the Saviour of the world.

This past week, Jonathan and I have had guests for dinner on Monday, out of town guests Tuesday through Friday, and more overnight guests Friday into yesterday. That is to say we have been busy! As I am sure you all know and experience, when house guests come, we make ready the house: we organize, we clean, we do the laundry, we shop and cook. We go for the *Good Housekeeping Award* to make sure that our guests are happy and comfortable ~ and perhaps we are tempted into luring them into thinking that we live in such a clean, organized, delightful environment all of the time because we don't want them to know what it is like the rest of the time.

This is what the collect for today is talking about. Hear again today's collect:

“Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*”

This collect for the fourth Sunday in Advent is asking God to help us be ready to host Jesus in our midst, not just at Christmas, but all of the time and every day. It is asking God to help us as the Church and as individuals to be preparing daily our homes, our lives, and our hearts, that we might be ready for Jesus to come as a guest. In asking God to purify our consciences, we are asking that God take away from us the things that get in our way of being who God calls us to be. In the lesson from Romans, Paul tells us that we are “called to be saints,” as beloved baptized people of God. Purity isn't about separating good people from bad people. Rather, purity here is about the process of removing what is bad, unhealthy, distracting, and even idolatrous from our lives in order that we might be our most authentic selves, as reflections of God's divine image.

And likened to my having house guests every day since Monday, the daily requirements for constant preparedness can be taxing. However, I will say that it gets easier when you are able to stay on top of the work every day. The same is true in our spiritual lives. When we do the daily work being spiritually prepared, we are in a much better condition to see, recognize, and welcome Jesus into our midst. This is one reason we at St. Luke in the Fields offer daily mass. We have frequent opportunities in the Church to engage in the spiritual disciplines including daily Eucharist, daily office, services of healing, confession, Bible study, *The Bible Challenge*, outreach, spiritual direction, centering prayer to name a few. The question is: how are we taking advantages of these opportunities and to what extent? Engaging in daily spiritual disciplines is what helps keep us ready and alert to welcome Jesus in our hearts and in our lives.

The collect asks that we do these things, these spiritual disciples, so that Jesus “may find in us a mansion for himself.” Remember the Christmas story that our children are now learning and preparing for the Pageant? Mary and Joseph get to Bethlehem after a long journey, and what? “There was no room for them in the inn.” This collect is praying that we be ready to welcome Jesus not in an animal troth; “Not in that poor lowly stable, with the oxen standing round;” but rather that we have prepared for Jesus a mansion. There was no room in the inn at Jesus’ first Advent. We have the opportunity, through our daily spiritual practices, to prepare in our hearts a mansion for Jesus. We realize that we need to give to God our best because we are always given God’s best.

This Advent, as we have this holy obligation to prepare our hearts and our lives for Jesus’ coming, may God reveal Godself to us in our daily lives that we may seek God’s purification ~ and may God grant us the grace to prepare daily within ourselves the very best we have to offer so that we “without shame or fear may rejoice to behold [Jesus’] appearing.”



In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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