

Advent Reflection #1

~ by the Rev. Nancy Yee

First Advent in the Middle of a Pandemic

As I write this reflection, we are living through a turbulent time. A global pandemic threatens the health of millions. Political viewpoints sever relationships. Protests and demonstrations call for racial justice. Five Anglican parishes merging into one. We're feeling anxious, frightened, overwhelmed.

We're in need of healing: physically from a virus that has claimed too many lives, emotionally from strained and severed relationships, spiritually from the fatigue of doubt and fear and relationally from trying to work with strangers in Christ via Zoom. Our perceptions of others are tainted by video conferencing and our Christian relationships suffer because of misperceptions and misunderstandings.

In the current time of chaos and uncertainty, we need to remember that Jesus was born into a world facing disorder, oppression, and fright as well. People then, as now, longed for a Messiah who would save them, bring them wholeness and healing.

Advent is a time of deliberate attention to preparing our hearts for welcoming the Christ. Often, we think of Advent as one season in the church year, the four weeks prior to Christmas. But, in actuality, our faith has three Advents. In other words, we're called to wait for Jesus in three different ways.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a medieval monk, says, "We know His threefold coming: **to** humankind, **into** humankind and **against** humankind. To all He comes without distinction, but not so into all or against all."

St. Bernard says, the Lord Jesus **comes to all in the First Advent**, which is the Incarnation, God taking on human flesh. Advent celebrates Immanuel, God with us. As our new parish is named Immanuel, may our hope be that others who do not yet know the First Advent will see our new parish as a place where they can hear the good news of Christ.

The Second Advent is the formation of Christ in believers' hearts. St. Bernard says that this Advent comes only to some. Not everyone is ready or has received Christ in their hearts. It is only by God's grace that the Christ dwells in our hearts. But, when the Second Advent does happen, you will know. You will have deep peace in uncertain times and deep joy in sorrow. You will begin to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength; your neighbour as yourself and even love your enemy. It's of spiritual essence that we continue to pray that the Second Advent is made real to us through consistent prayer, fasting, repentance, study and regular worship.

The Third Advent is the return of Jesus, the second coming. This, St. Bernard says, is the time when Jesus returns to judge both the living and the dead. Others call the Third Advent the Final Judgment, when Jesus comes against humanity. It's been said that the Final Judgment will be different for true believers and followers of Jesus than it will be for non-believers. I don't know. All I know is that in Christ Jesus, there is love, forgiveness, mercy and compassion. When our faith is in Christ, nothing can separate us from the love of God. And although the Third Advent can sound scary, we don't have to worry if we are open to believing in the First Advent and receiving the Second Advent.

All three Advents are the arrival of Christ in different ways. All three are meant to provoke faith and hope in us, no matter what season it is. May we all be given grace to persevere in following Jesus, during these trying times and may all Three Advents become a personal reality for us in the days ahead.