

Advent 1, Year B
November 30, 2014
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Shari Young Preacher

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. This is the season of preparation, as we call it, the season of preparation for one of two of our biggest parties Christmas, the other being Easter.

I love parties, I just had a small one at my home for Thanksgiving, and I had a big one last spring. I spent a lot of preparing: Ordering my turkey at Whole Foods, setting the table and making it beautiful, tidying the house, bringing in firewood and laying a fire and so on. It was fun making things ready for my guests.

Here in church we in church we are also getting ready for a party, but have somewhat of an odd way to prepare for our party: We get quiet and we wait.

There is a reason that the mood in church is so markedly different during Advent from that of the society around us:

We are preparing spiritually, not materially. We are preparing our souls for the birth of the Christ. At home we are preparing for Santa Claus and presents, and festivities, and that is all fine and well, but here in church we are reminded that we are preparing for Jesus. In church we are more subdued than usual, and we are patiently waiting....

The 14th century German scholar and mystic Meister Eckhardt says that the birth of Jesus “falls in the soul exactly as it does in eternity, neither more nor less, for it is the same birth.” Eckhard teaches that the birth of Jesus falls in the ground and essence of the soul just as it does in Bethlehem.

Advent is the season of preparing our spiritual selves, for the birth of the light, of the holy, of the divine.... in our souls.

In Advent the church reminds us that we are destined to be people of light, with light filling us, and streaming out of us. As Eckhard says “It is characteristic of this birth that it always come with fresh light....it is the nature of good to spread outwards.” In this re-birth of Jesus at Christmas, God pours into our souls a huge amount of light which spills over into all our being.

And how are we to prepare our spiritual selves for a re-birth of this light? Firstly, it is not so different from preparing for the arrival of guests: We clean house and we set the table. Christianity teaches spiritual housecleaning in two major ways: Reconciliation and Eucharist.

Reflecting on the wrongs we have done and repenting of them by saying we are sorry to God, or to the person wronged, or to a priest is the sacrament of Reconciliation. It is a holy thing to clean out the paths through which light might enter us, and then spread abroad to others.

Because of conflict I am having with another person, I had cause a couple days ago to reflect on some of the ways I have let people down, and have failed to live up to the fullness of who I could be. It was healing to be so honest and to shed tears, and to let go knowing I am forgiven.

Eucharist feeds us spiritually, and fills us with light on a weekly basis.

In Advent we are invited to honesty and to strip down to basics. We hear these lessons of judgment and we are invited to purify and clean out.

We light one candle on the Advent wreath as we approach Christmas. The light is growing closer and closer. We are invited to prepare for its birth in our souls