



# ST. JOHN'S NEWSLETTER



St. John's Episcopal Church, 4 Church Street,  
Essex, New York, 12936  
The Rev. Margaret E. Shaw

Website: [www.StJohnsEssexNY.com](http://www.StJohnsEssexNY.com) Email: [stjohnschurch@willex.com](mailto:stjohnschurch@willex.com)  
518-963-7775

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## FROM THE RECTOR'S DESK

Dear Parish Family,

The community Thanksgiving service is now in the past and I want to thank everyone who helped make it possible. I find worshipping together as an ecumenical community truly meaningful.

Although various Christian groups and denominations will continue to have differences, the fact that we are members of one family is something to always remember. Just as in our own families where not everyone thinks alike, lives alike, or has the same priority of values, we can still learn from one another, share with one another, and cherish one another.

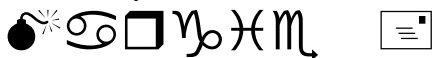
Now it is Advent. Like Lent, Advent is usually thought of as a penitential season. However, Advent is less about an examination of our own nature than it is about the preparation for Christ's incarnation at Christmas and his promise that he will one day return again in power and glory. The readings for the season are often about the end-time and on what God promises the people of Israel and the church of Christ. In the past traditional themes for Advent were death, judgment, hell, and heaven. Today we have lightened up a bit, but it is sometimes good to ponder just how desperate the Jews of Israel were for a savior, a messiah, someone to rescue them from the various forms of oppression under which they lived. It sets the context into which Jesus was born. In doing so, we can also reflect on the context within which we live. Although we can hardly compare ourselves with the oppressed

Near East, we still live in a world of oppression. For most of us the oppression we live under is very subtle and much of it comes from within ourselves. We can be very hard on ourselves with unrealistic goals, unfair judgments, expectations, and comparisons. On our own, it is very difficult to free ourselves from self-criticism.

Nevertheless, I ask you, from what would you like to be saved? What oppression would you like to have lifted from your shoulders and how do you imagine Christ's great love for you might accomplish this? How might God, breaking into the world through Jesus, transform your life from the inside out? Are you ready to put your trust in God, waiting wide-eyed like a small child on Christmas morning for God's transforming gift? In return, are you ready to give yourself back to God, or are you afraid to let go of those mean things you say about yourself – those things which keep you from being completely open to Jesus' joyful presence. As we ponder these things, thinking about how we might participate in God's purposes for ourselves, our families, and the world, we can do so with anticipation and excitement. Advent is not meant to be a sad time, but rather a time of reflection and a time of hope. As we go about our Christmas preparations, including the planning, shopping, decorating, baking, gift-wrapping, card writing, entertaining, and carol singing, we can do so with more than one purpose. These activities remind us of the wonder that lies ahead, while keeping us focused on the significance of the moment, for whatever we are doing at any point in time,

can be done with an awareness of God's life-saving/giving Incarnation.

May Advent be filled with anticipation for you and those you love,



## EVERGREENS AND THE ADVENT WREATH

The beginning of Advent is a time for the [hanging of the green](#), decoration of the church with evergreen wreaths, boughs, or trees that help to symbolize the new and everlasting life brought through Jesus the Christ. Some churches have a special weekday service, or the first Sunday evening of Advent, or even the first Sunday morning of Advent, in which the church is decorated and the Advent wreath put in place. This service is most often primarily of music, especially choir and hand bells, and Scripture reading, along with an explanation of the various symbols as they are placed in the sanctuary.

**The Advent wreath** is an increasingly popular symbol of the beginning of the Church year in many churches as well as homes. It is a circular evergreen wreath (real or artificial) with five candles, four around the wreath and one in the center. Since the wreath is symbolic and a vehicle to tell the Christmas story, there are various ways to understand the symbolism. The exact meaning given to the various aspects of the wreath is not as important as the story to which it invites us to listen, and participate.

The **circle of the wreath** reminds us of God Himself, His eternity and endless mercy, which has no beginning or end. The **green of the wreath** speaks of the hope that we have in God, the hope of newness, of renewal, of eternal life. **Candles** symbolize the light of God coming into the world through the birth of His son. The **four outercandles** represent the period of waiting during the four Sundays of Advent, which

themselves symbolize the four centuries of waiting between the prophet Malachi and the birth of Christ.

The **colors of the candles** vary with different traditions, but there are usually three purple or blue candles, corresponding to the sanctuary colors of Advent, and one pink or rose candle. One of the purple candles is lighted the first Sunday of Advent, a Scripture is read, a short devotional or reading is given, and a prayer offered. On subsequent Sundays, previous candles are relighted with an additional one lighted. The pink candle is usually lighted on the third Sunday of Advent. However, different churches or traditions light the pink candle on different Sundays depending on the symbolism used (see above on [Colors of Advent](#)). In Churches that use a [Service of the Nativity](#), it is often lighted on the fourth Sunday of Advent, the final Sunday before Christmas.

The **light of the candles** itself becomes an important symbol of the season. The light reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world that comes into the darkness of our lives to bring newness, life, and hope. It also reminds us that we are called to be a light to the world as we reflect the light of God's grace to others (Isa 42:6). The progression in the lighting of the candles symbolizes the various aspects of our waiting experience. As the candles are lighted over the four week period, it also symbolizes the darkness of fear and hopelessness receding and the shadows of sin falling away as more and more light is shed into the world. The flame of each new candle reminds the worshippers that something is happening, and that more is yet to come. Finally, the light that has come into the world is plainly visible as the Christ candle is lighted at Christmas, and worshippers rejoice over the fact that the promise of long ago has been realized.

The **first candle** is traditionally the candle of **Expectation or Hope** (or in some traditions, Prophecy). This draws attention to the anticipation of the coming of a Messiah that weaves its way like a golden thread through Old Testament history. As God's people were abused by power hungry kings, led astray by self-centered prophets, and lulled into

apathy by half-hearted religious leaders, there arose a longing among some for God to raise up a new king who could show them how to be God's people. They yearned for a return of God's dynamic presence in their midst.

And so, God revealed to some of the prophets that indeed He would not leave His people without a true Shepherd. While they expected a new earthly king, their expectations fell far short of God's revelation of Himself in Christ. And yet, the world is not yet fully redeemed. So, we again with expectation, with hope, await God's new work in history, the second Advent, in which He will again reveal Himself to the world. And we understand in a profound sense that the best, the highest of our expectations will fall far short of what our Lord's Second Advent will reveal!

The **remaining three candles** of Advent may be associated with different aspects of the Advent story in different churches, or even in different years. Usually they are organized around characters or themes as a way to unfold the story and direct attention to the celebrations and worship in the season. So, the sequence for the remaining three Sundays might be Bethlehem, Shepherds, Angels. Or Love, Joy, Peace. Or John the Baptist, Mary, the Magi. Or the Annunciation, Proclamation, Fulfillment. Whatever sequence is used, the Scripture readings, prayers, lighting of the candles, the participation of worshipers in the service, all are geared to telling the story of redemption through God's grace in the Incarnation.

The **third candle**, usually for the Third Sunday of Advent, is traditionally Pink or Rose, and symbolizes **Joy** at the soon Advent of the Christ. It marks a shift from the more solemn tone of the first two Sundays of Advent that focus on Preparation and Hope, to a more joyous

atmosphere of anticipation and expectancy. Sometimes the colors of the sanctuary and vestments are also changed to Rose for this Sunday. As noted above, in some churches the pink Advent candle is used on the fourth Sunday to mark the joy at the impending Nativity of Jesus.

Whatever sequence is adopted for these Sundays, the theme of Joy can still be the focus for the pink candle. For example, when using the third Sunday to commemorate the visit of the Magi the focus can be on the Joy of worshipping the new found King. Or the Shepherds as the symbol for the third Sunday brings to mind the joy of the proclamation made to them in the fields, and the adoration expressed as they knelt before the Child at the manger. If used on the fourth Sunday of Advent, it can symbolize the Joy in fulfilled hope.

The **center candle** is white and is called the **Christ Candle**. It is traditionally lighted on Christmas Eve or Day. However, since many Protestant churches do not have services on those days, many light it on the Sunday preceding Christmas, with all five candles continuing to be lighted in services through [Epiphany](#) (Jan 6). The **central location of the Christ Candle** reminds us that the incarnation is the heart of the season, giving light to the world.



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Thanks to Dad Hengeveld 02-16-2009  
I'VE TRIED TO EXPLAIN THAT HE'S GOING TO BE WITH ME FOREVER, BUT HE JUST DOESN'T GET IT

## VESTRY HIGHLIGHTS

By Warden Lynne Goepper

St. John's is blessed to have a vestry which is intent on keeping expenses under control and looking at the future; minding building and grounds maintenance; supporting more outreach efforts; and working to increase our interaction with our Essex community.

**STEWARDSHIP:** Hooray! Most pledges are in, We have received almost \$123,000 which is less than our goal of \$140,000. However mostly everyone who pledged also raised quite significantly over last year. (Thank you, Jon McBride for your inspirational and moving talk in September). If you have forgotten to return your pledge, now is the time to do so...before we have to make more cuts.

**FINANCE:** ReNew and "Scoop" endeavors were enthusiastically supported by volunteers.

Translation..... more funds to help those in need this winter.

Jon McBride has reviewed St. John's investments to determine how best to "grow" what we have, considering our needs now and future.

### OLD BUSINESS:

The vestry is assessing a request for a new office copier as the current machine is costing more than a new one! We have received an offer to lease a new copier. The lease contract would include servicing.

Although the rectory has undergone needed repairs, the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor bath tub/shower repair needs further attention due to problems with mold. A repair bid has been received.

### NEW BUSINESS

The program committee is developing winter activities: hosting the annual ecumenical Thanksgiving service, Christmas in Essex (Dec 5) ReNew to be open + cookies (packaged by the ½ dozen); Lessons and Carols Christmas Eve Eucharist followed with a buffet, Taize Service. Other possibilities: Once a month Sunday evening guest speakers, discussion group on generational poverty,; exploring a youth musical program (vocal); "Quiet"Day....Add your own thoughts via Margie or Lynne

Next vestry meeting: Dec 16<sup>th</sup> at 3:30

## ST. John's Episcopal Church Service Schedule:

### Sunday morning

Holy Eucharist, Rite II 9:15 AM

### Wednesdays

Morning Prayer, Rite II 9:00 AM

Bible Study 10:00 AM

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

**Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>**

Essex Day

**Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup>**

Service of Lessons and Carols

4:00 PM

**Thursday, December 24<sup>th</sup>**

Christmas Eve Eucharist

5:00 PM

**Sunday, January 10<sup>th</sup>**

Taize Service

7:00 PM

Have news? Would you like to see or add something to the newsletter? Comments?

Call Kathy @ the church office

518-963-7775 M-F 2:20PM-5:00PM

## **BOOK REVIEW**

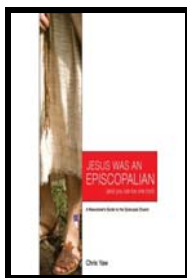
By Kathy Henderson

### Jesus Was An Episcopalian

The author's main point is this: We are at a major crossroads in the history of Christianity. God is calling us to live out our faith in powerful new ways that can have a profound impact on the entire world. The confluence of globalization, new forms of communication and the spread of

"Emerging Church" thinking is adding to this urgency.

This is a wonderful, bright, informative book (Bishop Tutu loved it, too!) that is a good reminder of who we are and Whose we are. It would make a great gift for that family member of yours who doesn't quite get it how you ended up in the "Episcopalian" church. Or for your co-worker who wonders what you are doing over at that church all week.



## It's Gift-Giving Time!

Mother's Day. Father's Day. Christmas. Birthday. Anniversary. Opening up a new bank account. It seems like it's always gift-giving time. If you're a Christian, that certainly is true, although maybe not in the same sense. Often when we hear someone play an inspiring musical piece or see an athlete perform a difficult feat, we say that person is so "gifted." What we really mean is "talented but the Christian has something more: spiritual gifts.

Simply put, a spiritual gift is a God-given ability for spiritual service. One receives one or more spiritual gifts at the moment of salvation.

Some of the gifts are: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, mercy, helps, and administration. Every believer has one or more of these gifts, and is expected to use them to build up the body of Christ and glorify God (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:11).

How do you know what your gifts are? One way is by checking your Desire, Affirmation, and Experience. Ask yourself, "What do I desire to do? How do I want to serve?" Then look for affirmation: What feedback do I get from other people? What do they say I do well or not so well? Then think back on your experiences: "What have been the results of my work?

Have people gotten saved or had their lives changed?" If what you have done in the past has been well received and borne fruit, then you have a pretty good idea of what your gifts are.

Remember that spiritual gifts are used for spiritual results. If your gift is teaching, but you are not teaching spiritual truths, then you are not exercising it properly. If your gift is the ability to help in the background, but you're not using it in a spiritual setting (church or ministry), then it's not being used properly. Of course, any setting that allows you to use the gift(s) for spiritual results is proper. For example, leading someone to Christ can be done anywhere. Showing mercy by praying for someone or giving a needy person a cup of cold water in the name of Christ is appropriate any time.

Can a person lose his or her gift(s)? The Bible does not indicate that someone can lose a gift, but it does teach that a Christian can lose his or her effectiveness. Paul disciplined himself and exercised hard so as not to be disqualified from his reward (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). He told young Timothy to not neglect the gift that he had (1 Timothy 4:14). The danger isn't so much burnout as it is rust out.

So, the good news is that you can perform a great service for God's kingdom, no matter how old you are or feel! God has given you gifts, and He wants you to share them with others. There is no retiring from this duty! Psalm 92:12-15 says:

12The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;

13planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts our God.

14They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,

15proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

Ever get a gift that needed instructions and batteries? Spiritual gifts come with both. The instructions are simple: "Above all, love each other deeply" (1 Peter 4:8). And, the batteries are already supplied: "There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men" (1 Corinthians 12:6). It's gift-giving time!

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
PO BOX 262  
4 CHURCH STREET  
ESSEX, NY 12936

**BULK RATE  
PERMIT # 11  
ESSEX, NY 12936**



**Our Mission at St. John's Church**

*We share in God's work of calling,  
forming, sending, and supporting  
Christians as agents of love, justice, and  
peace as shown through the life of Jesus  
Christ.*