

“Fruit Bearing”

Let me begin today by sharing the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians chapter 1: *“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 1:3-6) During the season of Advent we are indeed waiting and preparing for the day of Christ Jesus when He comes again in power and great glory.

- Just 2 weeks ago we lit the first Advent candle - the candle that represents *“hope.”* It symbolizes our hope for God’s coming again. *“The great day of the LORD is near -- near and coming quickly. Listen!”* according to the Prophet Zephaniah 1:14.
- Last Sunday – the Second Sunday of Advent, (when we had our wonderful; pageant – with the angels and shepherd and lambs – it was amazing) we lit another purple candle, the *“Peace”* candle. When I think of peace – I think of when Jesus met the Apostles in the Upper Room, through a door that was locked – and He just appeared there- and said *“My Peace I give to you, peace be with you.”* Peace; Shalom! This morning we heard a reading from Paul which sounded an awful lot like our closing bless: *“the peace of God which surpasses understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”* He asked for the peace of God to be upon you!
- This morning, we lit the Rose-Colored Candle. Many think it is pink, but it is Rose – according to the Liturgical calendar – what does that mean? It is the *“Joy”* candle.
- Next Sunday, the last purple candle will be lit – the candle of *“Love.”* *Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.* You will see that on Christmas Eve we will replace all of them with white candles and light a large white candle in the center – the Christ Candle – the Christmas Candle.

The season of Advent gives us four weeks to think about where we are in God’s creation of things. Advent is supposed to be the time when we, as individuals, as members of the Body of Christ, look at ourselves in the mirror. We should look at that reflection of ourselves and consider what our place is within this large and wonderful family – the Body of Christ. *“Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.”* If you are not sure – we someone is and who someone does – all you need to do is just ask Jesus to show you! Yes, Jesus loves you – the Bible tells you so!

In today’s Holy Gospel in Luke 3:7-8 John the Baptizer boldly told them *“You brood of vipers”* (This is really not a compliment!) *“who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”* *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham”* John was telling them plain and simple - it is about who you believe in – not who you are related to! Bear fruit – or as the Greek says **‘καρπὸς’**.

John’s words penetrated right into the heart of the sinner and brought them to their knees in repentance. That kind of preaching and power only comes through the power of the Holy

Third Sunday of Advent, December 16, 2018, Year C

Spirit! Of course not everyone who heard him would repent. Many would walk away still lost in their sin. Many would be in need of his message, they would turn away from their behavior and repent and then allow John to baptize them in the River Jordan. God had him baptize so many that he became known as John the Baptizer or John the Baptist.

I want to suggest to you - what good does it do for any of us to say that “Jesus is the Reason for the Season,” unless we really recognize that sin and salvation are the reasons for Jesus’ Coming and becoming a person in the first place? Let us not forget that “Jesus is the Reason for the Season” and “Keep Christ in Christmas” but we have got to know why He came in the first place. He came because of you and me. The message of repentance for sin and salvation from sin needs to be heard – and that each one of us – all of mankind is truly in need of a Savior. To be rescued from ourselves! Unfortunately, there are some who believe that they have no need of any help, they don’t need a Savior! Honestly, we should be doing the same thing that John the Baptist did, “PROCLAIMING THE COMING OF THE LORD TO A WORLD LOST IN SIN!” John was indeed called to be getting the Word out!

The Greek word for getting the Word out is **κηρύσσω** (kerusso). Kay Russo is not the lady who served lunch in the high school cafeteria with a little net on her head! Kerusso **κηρύσσω** means “proclaiming, or preaching” – living God’s Word so that others benefit from our efforts. St. Francis of Assisi is credited with saying “preach the Gospel always, and if necessary – use words!” You don’t have to stand on a street corner, banging on a “rollie Bible” – you could be standing in front of a kettle in front of Belk’s, ringing the bell and saying, “Merry Christmas and God bless you!” John the Baptist preached in the wilderness and you and I are in a wilderness today too. That might change somebody’s frozen heart this Christmas season. Unbelievable. John the Baptist preached in the wilderness and you and I are in the wilderness today. We live in a fallen world with people who are looking for something, who are broken, who are hurting, – and that something that they are looking for has a Name. His Name is Jesus, Yeshua. How we respond makes all the difference.

John preached about the coming harvest of men’s souls and that message is just as real today as it was then. John said that Jesus was coming. Jesus, the Master builder, the Chief Cornerstone, the very Son of God, who had all power in Heaven and in Earth, and He was coming for a purpose. John proclaimed the truth in the Gospel of John 1:29 “*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” Not just the sin of St. Andrew’s Anglican Church or First Baptist, or any other church!

I need to share with you what happened on Wednesday night. About forty people of all ages from Saint Andrew’s went to four different places to bring some joy to folks who can’t get out this Christmas time. We stopped first at Lakeside Senior Living on North Chester. We went, not the front where a lot of people just walk in, but we went back to where it was needed the most, back to the assisted living/medical wing – and it was wonderful! A large group of residents were waiting for us. The nurses were so kind – as they lined them up so we could go and sing to them. I wish you could have seen the faces of these residents light up as our kids – young and older – sang to them with the love of Christ. Talk about getting the “word out.” Later

Third Sunday of Advent, December 16, 2018, Year C

I heard some of our kids sharing how much it meant to them to do this. Later we went to three houses and sang to these folks too, making their ‘season bright.’ We didn’t get any ‘Figgie Pudding’ even though we sang about it at every single house. Connie Leis made hot chocolate for the carolers, and Jim just glowed because of the love that was shared. It was not only fun and a blessing, but it was rewarding to everyone involved. This group of carolers was truly producing fruit – but also exhibiting the ‘Hope, Peace, Joy and Love’ of the season of Advent – the season of preparation.

The Gospel of Matthew in chapter 3 gives us the same view of John the Baptist that Luke wrote about, warning the Pharisees and Sadducees. He went on to say “*The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*” (Matthew 3:10-11) John was truly an inspired man who loved to proclaim, (Kerusso **κηρύσσω**) “*the one who is more powerful than I*” and that He was coming soon. You might be saying – 2,000 years – where is he? What was it St. Peter said, “a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day”? (2 Peter 3:8) He will come in God’s time!

If you recall that the pregnant Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea, near Jerusalem. Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John, who would be called the Baptist. When Mary entered and “*Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"*” (Luke 1:41-42) Some translations read: “*Blessed is the fruit of your womb!*” I looked at the original Greek transcript and sure enough there it was – ‘**καρπὸς**’- fruit. Fruit is such an important by-product of efforts and blessings to others.

Remember John’s words in today’s Holy Gospel, “*The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*” (Luke 3:9) Jesus also had something to say about what He expects when He comes again: “*By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*” (Matthew 7:16-20) He later said in the Gospel of John: “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*” (John 15:5)

In closing – let me ask you this: if the Lord were to come back today, right now – would He find evidence of fruit in your life? Jesus wants each one of us to be recognized and to be encouraged and follow His instructions, knowing that: “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last.*” (John 15:16)