

## *From the desk of Fr. Jim*

### **Advent 1 - Waiting with Simeon**

It takes an uncommon spiritual focus to be able to see through the contemporary trappings regarding the Christmas celebration. Today, the symbol of the season is not a manger, but a dried Christmas tree stacked in the alley the day after Christmas. There is nothing sadder, not so much that we forget about Jesus' birthday, but that we miss a dramatic opportunity to experience the longing of humanity for the solution to our need.

The way Advent and Christmas are celebrated is like talking to someone who has the bad habit of responding before you are finished making a point. Even though Christmas is now imbedded under the debris of a secularized holiday, it is still the proclamation of the dramatic truth that is at the heart of the Christmas message.

May I suggest to you that you use this Advent season for something that has become uncommon. We need focal points in our spiritual journey. The liturgical year has evolved from ancient times to provide us with these as we move through the seasons. Composed primarily of liturgical readings, prayers and reflections for both the daily Masses and the prayers throughout each day we share a journey of prayer together.

To simplify this in our overly busy lives, I will offer some overarching themes for each of the weeks of Advent. I pray that our reflection on them will be helpful and that we will allow the journey of the liturgical year to guide us along our way.

The first week of Advent is a time to reflect on our watchfulness. Throughout the Scriptures, there is a sense of expectation and surprise that undergirds the events, even those reported in the Old Testament. The examples of this are too numerous to even begin to mention, but a few of the more pivotal are specifically important.

The promise made to Abraham is considered the ground upon which our experience with God is built. It was a promise of protection and care in the midst of a life fraught with fear and without hope. From Abraham's descendants, a great nation would arise. But Abraham was childless. He had no heir through whom this promise would be realized. Years and years passed. The promise was renewed, sometimes in rare mystical experiences and at other times as the result of humbling experiences of protection in the midst of danger. Abraham's whole life was directed by a promise, yet unrealized because, he had no heir.

It is said that the one thing that makes us human, that separates us from all the other creatures of the earth, and characterizes our life more dramatically than anything else, is hope. When we find this strength diminished or questioned, we may wonder what purpose there is to life. We might be unable to get up in the morning.

It is absolutely amazing, even miraculous, to watch the images of a war-torn country thread across the screen of our television, and see people who, by every logic should be hiding in their basement, afraid to enter the light of day. And yet, there they are, removing the rubble of the latest attack, rebuilding, moved by the mysterious force of hope.

Abraham was like that. Moses, David, Isaiah, and countless others built their life around a promise. There is a beautiful figure of a man at the end of the narrative of Jesus' birth found in St. Luke's Gospel. He is Simeon, a priest of the Temple. Here is what is said about him:

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."*

**Luke 2:25-32**

It is not merely the patience of Simeon that impresses us, but the absolute joy that he experiences as that promise is fulfilled. And it is not merely in the past that this fulfillment has come to light. It might be true that if we anticipate nothing, if we wait for nothing, nothing will ever happen. If we choose to direct our life to fulfillment of the promises of God, we will see what Simeon saw.

**A QUESTION FOR YOUR REFLECTION:**

What do I hope for in my life? Is this hope part of God's promise? Do I pray for this to come true?

A suggestion: Write down your answer to the first question. Seal it in an envelope and bring it to every Mass you attend this Advent and Christmas. We are people who live according to the promises of God.