

Season Had Difficult Birth

"Happy New Year!" No mistake here.

So what's going on then?

Next Sunday is the First Sunday in Advent – and the beginning of the new church year. So "Happy New Year" indeed.

"Advent" is Latin for appearance, approach, or coming. Small wonder then, that the message of John the baptist is also Advent's central theme: "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight." Luke 3:4.

Advent didn't come to us ready made. There was no royal announcement to declare Advent's creation. No angel song to herald its arrival. Advent is entirely the invention of centuries of church people. And they didn't get it right with their first try. In fact, in its earliest form, beginning in France, the Advent Season was not even linked to Christmas but rather to Epiphany!

There were two main roads to Advent. The first came out of France in the fourth century, probably from Celtic monks. In those times, Advent was a season very similar to Lent. No one was permitted to skip church and fasting was required on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Other church councils even forbid the celebration of matrimony.

All of this led to Epiphany, January 6th, when converts were traditionally baptized after those 40 days of prayer and fasting.

There were still more stops and starts, u-turns and even wrong turns ahead. In Spain Advent was celebrated with five Sundays, not four. And the season had a strong emphasis on the Annunciation, when angels told Mary that she would bear a son.

The emphasis was still not on Christ's birth. Then in the sixth century a second road finally linked Advent *continued on back page*

Elections Nearing for Next Bishop



This Friday at 9:00 our Episcopal Diocese begins its Walkabout. That's the only opportunity that the lay and clergy electors will have to meet and question the seven candidates who have been nominated to succeed Bishop John Lipscomb – a position called Bishop Coadjutor. The Walkabout occurs at the Venice Convention Center. Voting occurs 8 days later at the cathedral in St. Petersburg.

In 2006 Shirley Davis, Greg Duckett and Tom Krug are St. Augustine's delegates, elected at our Annual Parish Meeting in January. Others may attend the convention as non-voting representatives.

The chief clergy officer of a diocese is called a bishop. In the Episcopal Church there are 110 dioceses with 296 bishops, 141 of whom are retired.

You are urged to talk with our delegates about what you feel this diocese needs and what needs improvement.



The Back Forty, St. Augustine's Other Half. Of nearly 4 acres, almost half our property lies unused. What good options are open to us? What does good stewardship suggest? See p 2.

Embrace the Adventure!

Contemplate waiting. How many kinds of waiting can you identify?

We wait in supermarket lines, lines at the tollway or bridges, at restaurants, movies and we wait in traffic. You might recreate some of the feelings you've had in other, bigger events: final grades, admission letters, medical test results, promotion meetings, awards, birthdays, anniversaries, or rites of passage.

Waiting creates a whole spectrum of reactions: positive and negative, welcoming or frustrating, exciting or sobering. These feelings also have degrees of importance. Few of us would confuse waiting to see a teller at the bank with the electric anticipation of a coming birthday (for the younger among us). Or, for those of us "of riper years," anticipation of our own wedding!

Waiting has a life and a meaning of its own. Michael Valentine Smith (from the novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*) says "Waiting is fullness."

Scripture confronts us with two observations which force us to consider new ways of waiting: Do you see a pause as a nuisance or an opportunity? We are told, "Be still then and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:11)

Music is meaningless without rests.

Do you let random events shape you? Or do you seize the occasion to do something you have been wanting to do but might not have had the time? Or simply seized the opportunity to reflect? Small moments can refresh us, allow us to organize and prioritize, and they can be rich occasions for prayer or ministry.

Reflection is the path to self-knowledge. Prayer is the way we open ourselves to the presence of God. Service is the beginning of community. Faith requires all three. And Thanksgiving places us in the presence of God.

Seasons of waiting and contemplation can result in miracles. Our lives can be profoundly changed in a singular moment of clarity and revelation.

We must be prepared for the unexpected. Expectations are too limiting. Miracles happen all around us - it is our task to notice. Be still.

Fr. Robin

**Inquirers' Class
for Everyone
Today at 11:00
Ford Hall**

Text: Welcome to the Episcopal Church; An Introduction to Its History, Faith and Worship

This newsletter is for members and friends of one courageous Episcopal Church in south St. Petersburg, FL. "... more* from St. Augustine's" is about recognition, candor, nixing hearsay, spiritual attitude and, yes, unashamed cheer leading. Members Judy and Tom Krug are the project's co-editors. Some 65 parishioners are essential to the effort. We think of this publication as the first draft of our congregation's recent history. Issues are available each Sunday after the service and also online at www.staugstpete.org, our web site for church-shoppers.

Difficult Birth: Advent *continued*

directly to the coming of Christ – still not his birth, but rather, his Second Coming. And by the tenth century, the “get ready” prayers and practices of the Celtic monks had been fully integrated into Advent.

It was Pope St. Gregory VII (1073-1085) who set the current four-week length of Advent. Pope Gregory also designated the first Sunday of Advent as the beginning of the Church year. It begins the story of the events of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Only in the middle ages did the church begin using this season as preparation for the twelve day celebration of Christ's birth.

But Advent has fallen on hard times. It's a tricky season in the church today. From Halloween on, there is cultural pressure to "get to Christmas." It's become a time to get ready for whatever you're doing with family and friends on Christmas, and not a time to get ready for the coming of Jesus.

Practicing Advent as a religious season of waiting and expectation, of hope and anticipated joy will, in fact, help us celebrate Christmas. It's a journey.

Not all good news...

For many weeks everything from our Ford Hall Admin Building has been giddy-good news. Recently though, there are bizarre water leaks – even flooding after the supply has been turned off! Experts are investigating. So far no damage has been permanent, just humbling.

His Chosen Were Like You and Me

Explain it to me, please: why in the world does God select such frail folks for his work in Biblical history? Our Good Book heroes aren't just reluctant -- many of them are losers, seriously flawed characters indeed.

Abraham: pretty cowardly I'd say, and he cannot believe the promise. Jacob is a cheat and he struggles with everybody. And there's Joseph, one more immature, arrogant, teenage slacker. Moses is a murderer who cannot wait for God. Samson is a womanizing drunk. David is a poet-king, but he's also an adulterer. Solomon, Hezekiah -- these guys are not exactly All-Stars. And, for the biggest of God's tasks, we get a very young Jewish girl from a tiny village in a remote corner of a great empire. What's up here?

If our God chooses these imperfect characters to reveal Himself in such amazing ways, then God might even be able to use me as well, no matter how I feel. And when I say "Not me, Lord," that's not virtuous humble pie; maybe it's me shirking again. In fact, Nelson Mandela reminded us that "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us." So my timidity doesn't count much when God comes calling.

And this is the season for God's recruiting. In Advent our Church reminds us that He's Coming. In this season, we're all about getting ourselves ready.

I think I'd better stop putting limits on what God might do with the most unlikely of people.
Tom Krug



In a county where vacant land is almost gone, St. Augustine's is land rich. Many years ago a garden grew back there and vegetables were raised and sold. Recently, after the City fenced the perimeter, some parishioners had the area cleared of dense under-growth. Bulldozers leveled the mounds

of dumping that had blighted our view to the south. Now the question presents itself: with such a surplus of acreage, how should the land be used in the church's future? As income property? For parish expansion? Might it charitably be given over to another compatible neighbor?

Your Elected Parish Board, The Vestry

Sr. Warden: Mary Clowers 864-3568

Jr. Warden: Joyce Corn 540-0655

Clerk of the Vestry: Shirley Davis 866-1499

Parish Treasurer: Greg Duckett 866-1508

Inez Ford 327-9693

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Hazel Hudson-Allen 343-4157

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