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The Epistle

December, 2015

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Father Bob's message

I will confess that for some reason, as Christmas approaches, the world seems a little darker this year for me. Maybe I am just caught up in the pall that seems to hang over our national mood. A lot of people are uncertain, uncertain over a multitude of things but basically because they feel that they can no longer trust those institutions that they had trusted in the past. They are angry because they feel betrayed, ignored and treated as if they did not matter. Added to all of this is fear. Someone once wrote that if it were not for bad news there would be no news at all and that seems to be the case lately, does it not? Just within the last few months, there have been the shootings at Emanuel Church right here in South Carolina, the terrorist attacks in Paris and as I write this, a terrorist attack in San Bernardino. There is a political campaign going on that does not help, the rhetoric of those running characterized more by feeding the fear of some and encouraging the uncertainty of others, with what one is against being more important than what one is for. There is more and more talk that the endless war in the Middle East will continue with the increasing of the

number of our troops in Syria/Iraq to fight ISIS. I could go on but you know what I am saying. The world to me just seems much darker, even hostile, and I wonder what this Christmas will feel like when so much of the world seems to be in turmoil and the angel's cry of "peace on earth" seems more like a wish than a blessing. And when we gather on Christmas Eve/Day to sing carols, light candles, and hear the Christmas story, will it seem so very small a thing to do against the backdrop of this troubled and broken world?

But as I thought about this question, I realized that the only response, the only answer for a Christian, is indeed to gather on Christmas Eve/Day to sing carols, light candles and hear the promise of the Christmas story again. It may seem like an insignificant response but I would rather suggest that it is an audacious response. I thought about the Christmas story, especially Luke's narrative which we will read on Christmas Eve and I was struck by the fact that the events described in that story seem incredibly small and unimportant in the light of what was happening in the world. I mean what does Emperor Augustus or Governor Quirinius care about a pregnant Jewish teenager or wondering shepherds? Mary, Joseph and all the rest of the characters in the story are just common, ordinary folks compared to these rulers and power brokers. These powerful men were concerned about more important things than the birth of another Jewish child. And yet the author of Luke makes the audacious claim that the birth of a baby to an unwed teen amid the poverty of a small backwater town matters, that indeed it changed everything. In the light of this very common incident, the birth of another Jewish child, Augustus and Quirinius are reduced to being footnotes to what was to happen in that little town called Bethlehem. This is exactly what the author is stating when he names

those two power brokers. The author of Luke is affirming that God regularly shows up where you and I least expect God to be. The author of Luke is affirming that God uses the common, the ordinary and yes even the insignificant to work the wonders of his redeeming and transforming love and grace.

So though this world lay in sin and darkness, it is not forsaken, and the headlines we read and worry about will have their day and then fade again against the backdrop of this story that we have been telling for 2000 years. God loves this world. And God will not give up on it or us. Moreover, God continues to come to love and bless this very world that lay in sin and darkness. This is the Christmas message. This is the Christmas hope. This is the promise of Christmas. This is the Christmas mission for each one of us, to let the light of Christ shine in the darkness through our lives, knowing that God has promised that the darkness cannot and will not extinguish the light.

Lee's and my wish for you our St Stephen's family is that God bless and keep you in the palm of his hand, that God will fill you with his grace and love and that you may come to know that you are dear to God who is always near and with you. Have a blessed and merry Christmas.

Senior Warden Update

Our Annual Congregational Meeting was held on Sunday November 22nd after the service. The election of Mission Committee members, Senior Warden, Junior Warden Delegates to the Diocesan Convention and Alternates was held. The results are as follow:
Mission Committee: David Ford and Greg Koenig
Senior Warden: Tom Harwood
Junior Warden: David Ford

Delegates to Convention: Kathleen Harwood and Carter Siegling
Alternate Delegates: JoAnn Palmer and Greg Koenig

The food was so good that I think there was a motion to have the Annual Meeting once per month. Of course since that was not allowed in the by-laws we had to rule that the motion was out of order. In any case, if there wasn't a motion the suggestion did come up. Thank you to all our wonderful chefs. I believe we have the best chefs in the world at St. Stephen's. If you missed the meeting, don't miss next year. The Tuesday Advent discussion group is meeting in the church hall every Tuesday at 7 PM. Fr. Bob is conducting the meeting and it is very informative and enjoyable. Consider coming on Tuesday evening for both the discussion and fellowship.

With Christmas coming we will be busy finding the Crimson Tree, putting it up, decorating it and decorating the church. Fr. Bob has offered to head up the tree selection process and we are looking for anyone who would like to help out with the selection. Be sure to contact Fr. Bob to get on the committee. The tree should be selected and put in water outside the church by Friday 12/18. We will be decorating the church on Saturday 12/19 beginning at 9 AM and the Crimson Tree will be decorated after the service on 12/20. We will need all the help possible so please plan on attending one or all three events.

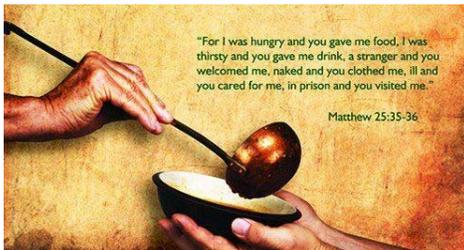
Our new Junior Warden, David Ford, has already gone to work. He has found mold in the church again and he will be coordinating a bid process for removing the mold professionally. After examining the situation it was decided that professional removal would be the best process. The sources of the mold need to be tracked down and corrected. The culprit is the millennium flood levels that

were produced by all the rain in the last few weeks.

You will notice that the Hospitality list in this Epistle will not show January. The sign up list for 2016 will be posted on the bulletin board by Sunday 12/13. When you can, sign up for any Sundays you may wish to have. Normally 2 Sundays a year is sufficient to cover everything. Remember, the importance of Hospitality is the fellowship after the service. Anything from coffee and drinks to whatever one wants to provide is well received.

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DID YOU SIGN UP FOR HOSPITALITY SOON?



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DECEMBER

12/6	David & Amanda Ford
12/13	Beverley Anderson
12/20	Paula & Frank Spinale
12/24	Christmas Eve
12/25	Christmas Day
12/27	OPEN

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Please wish the following people, a Happy Birthday:

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DECEMBER

12/5	Carolyn Babb
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12/6	Jacob Upchurch
12/15	Eleanor Milling
12/17	Gen Palmer VI
12/19	Harmony Addison
12/21	Ethan Lee Langdale
12/23	Jill Upchurch
12/28	Jennifer Palmer

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JANUARY

1/12	Robert Ellison, JR
1/19	Rowan Langdale
1/22	DeeDee Branham
1/30	Mary Jane Lever

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