

Advent: Casting Aside Distractions

By Father Jon Davis, Christ Church, Cedar Key Continued

Advent Voices: Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Mary

Hope is reinforced in several voices of the Advent season. In Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet, we are reminded of promises made that are soon to be realized. *The people who walked in darkness, have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.* Darkness is dispelled, shadows disappear, and light is manifest in the coming of Jesus.

Isaiah points to a manifest movement; we call this a Cycle of Light. Advent begins with a glimmer that grows brighter each week until we celebrate the Light of Christ coming into the world at Christmas. In the season of Epiphany following the twelve days of Christmas, light is made manifest to the whole world.

John the Baptist has a ministry of Preparing the Way. He is a forerunner, announcing to the world something is about to happen that transforms the very fabric of the world. There is a call for us to do the same. We prepare the way of the Lord by prayer and worship, devotion, repentance, self-reflection, study, charity. We cultivate the gifts of the Holy Spirit, kindness, compassion, mercy, joy, peace, and love.

Mary's life and example becomes a model for how we are to live. Her **YES** to God; *Be it unto me as you have said*, is a picture of ultimate discipleship. She becomes what the Greeks call *Theotokos* – the one who bears God. Again, this becomes our ministry and calling as well, we bear Jesus into a world in need of Good News and a Savior to redeem and save.

These Advent voices are reminders to inspire us to greater devotion to God and to serve humanity by loving our neighbor. Like looking through the lens of a camera, the words and stories of these saints position us to draw a sharper focus and that which was blurry becomes clearer as we take hold of our redemption drawing near.

What Advent Generates

We need the season of Advent to center our lives, as Hebrews 12:1-2 reminds us... *To throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*

Cast aside the commercialism, the pressure to perform, the multiple tasks and demands of a worldly Christmas. Be still, pause, consider, contemplate, and embrace the one who came because He loves you. We fix our eyes on Christ and He becomes the focus and filter for all we are, how we live, what we say and do.

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:8 that a *Crown of Righteousness* awaits all those who have longed for his appearing. As the quintessential Advent hymn declares: *Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel*. This is the promise of Advent, the appearing of our Redeemer and we are to remind the world this lies at the heart of what we celebrate on December 25.

Celebrating Advent in All Sorts of Churches

A well- practiced Advent makes for a meaningful and powerful Christmas. So, join in the Advent moments; light candles, cultivate hope, listen to Advent voices, you'll be glad you did!