

Advent 3—December 16, 2007
The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jimmy Carter in *Sources of Strength: Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith*, writes the following: “Yet this was no ordinary human but an extraordinary being, full of grace and truth...Isn’t it remarkable to see God coming to earth in this form? Not as a triumphant ruler, riding a white horse and wearing a crown, leading an army to expel the hated Romans and fulfilling human desires or ambitions, but rather as one who epitomizes unlimited forgiveness, compassion, service, peace, and love. A man, yet God, who was there when the universe was created, knowing everything, totally powerful.” He continues, “The simple but profound fact is that our lives can be changed—beginning now—by professing our faith in Jesus Christ.”

The four-week season of Advent is a time filled with emotions. These emotions may go from some sadness and melancholy...to excitement and great joy. We may be more stressed than usual. We cannot help but remember Christmases past, relationships that perhaps we no longer have, and our loved ones now in eternal life, and the special gifts that they brought to each Christmas. Every ornament we hang on the Christmas tree is an encyclopedia of memories. Amidst all of these emotions though that fill our hearts, we seek the underlying joy, the joy that we had as a child when we couldn’t wait to see what Christmas morning would bring. For on Christmas God promises each of us the possibility of a new day filled with hope and new life.

We read in today’s gospel from Matthew that John the Baptist while in prison seeks assurance that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one, the Son of God. Jesus responds to John’s disciples: *Go and tell John what you hear and see; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. (Matthew 11)* Jesus wants the Baptist to know that the hope of Advent is with them in the flesh—the Word of God is proclaimed, the sick are healed, and hope is present.

John the Baptist in prison, soon to be executed by Herod, needed to know that the Messiah had indeed come. Some days we need to look around and not be so caught up inside ourselves, and live as if we believe and know that the Messiah has indeed come. The holy season of Advent is not a pretend time where we live as if Jesus has not yet been born, but rather a season that we are asked to reflect upon what God has accomplished through the birth of his Son Jesus, and then hope for what we believe can be today because of this holy and magnificent event in Bethlehem.

Westina Matthews is a Ph.D. managing director at a wall Street firm and a graduate of the Spiritual Guidance Program at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual formation. She writes in a brief article entitled: “Finding God at Starbucks,” *On a spiritual retreat that included thirty-six hours of sacred silence, I began my daily ritual of walking one morning and had to confront an unexpected dilemma. My usual walking route took me through a wooded area to a residential community and eventually to Starbucks. Having the time to enjoy a cup of coffee and read the New York Times was a great luxury for me—a welcome respite from typically busy days back home. On this particular Sunday morning, I was torn about whether or not I could go to Starbucks and still maintain sacred silence, slipping folded bills and the note on which was written ‘Grande decaf, leave room for milk’ into my back pocket, I started out on my walk. As each footstep drew me closer to Starbucks, questions arose. Can silence be found at Starbucks? Is there sacredness in a cup of java? Is it sacrificial not to have the coffee? Will it be higher ground or higher grounds?*

Somewhere along the way, I began to think that perhaps I was searching for answers about something that did not require this much angst in my soul. God is not in the cup of coffee. God is in me. If my questioning is centered on the so-called godliness or ungodliness of having a cup of coffee, it would seem that I am missing the more compelling question around 'to be or not to be' one with God.

Advent is in particular a season that asks us to invite Jesus into our hearts—perhaps truly for the first time; or, perhaps to a deeper commitment. Advent is a journey to become one with Christ...one with God. The color purple that adorns our altar and the clergy vestments is a color of hope—hope that life can be different, that the Christ-Child has indeed made a difference, one that is experienced every day in your life and upon the lives that you touch. The Advent candles, one lit for each Sunday, are a prayer if you will that as we draw closer to Christmas; Jesus will draw us closer to himself and his will for our lives.

So let us together profess Jesus as Lord by our thoughts, words, and actions. Reflect upon what God has accomplished through His Son Jesus Christ, and hope for what is possible today because of this magnificent event. On this third Sunday of Advent, pray for what can be because of the birth of Jesus. +Amen