

Well, here we are! Christmas will be here in just four days! And while I do know some people who had their shopping finished in July, their homes decorated the day after Thanksgiving, and their holiday baking neatly packaged and ready for delivery yesterday, I know more people who are feeling the pressure rising as they wonder how they are going to get finished all of the things that need to get done in the next few days. Thinking about that reminds me of a story I heard once about a woman who had a very busy life – full time job, several children, involvement in numerous community activities – and she was in a whirlwind for a few weeks trying to get things ready so that her family could have a lovely Christmas celebration. She finally exhaled at around noon on Christmas Eve of that year, when the last gift was wrapped and tucked away. So, she sat down in a chair to relax, and picked up a stack of mail on the table next to her, and suddenly realized that she hadn't sent any Christmas cards – and sending Christmas cards was something she really liked to do. Well, she ran down to the local drug store and felt very lucky to find two identical boxes of cards with a design she liked on the front. She bought them, dashed home and signed and addressed them, and ran back to the post office before it closed on Christmas Eve, and then she went on to enjoy the holiday with her family.

A few days after Christmas she was doing a little clean-up around the house, and she came across one of the cards she had sent out, and for the first time she actually read the verse on the inside – and this is what it said:

“This card is just a note to say, a little gift is on the way!”

Needless to say, she learned a very important lesson that day, which is that no matter how busy you are, you've got to *pay attention!*

The season of Advent has traditionally been a time of preparation – a time of readying ourselves and preparing to make a place for God to come and live in our homes, in our churches, and in our hearts. But in the first reading assigned for this morning I noticed something that hadn't ever stood out for me before. In this lesson we find King David, ensconced in his new home, and it occurs to him that the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of the presence of God, was “living” outside in a tent. David decides that he needs to build a fine home for God. But God speaks to David through Nathan, saying, “Who are you to build a home for me? I have been with you wherever you have gone. You don't build a house for me – I build a house for you!”

This is a thought that catches our attention, and indeed, it's worth paying attention to, because those words are for us today just as they were for David. And if we pay attention to that subtle reversal – we're not making a home for God, but God is making a home for us – it can change the way in which we think about a number of things. And then maybe Advent becomes for us not so much about the incredible work that many of us do, and the responsibility many of us feel, to put our homes in proper order, and buy just the right gifts, and cook a fabulous meal, so that we can make Christmas a sparkling and wonderful experience for our family and friends. Maybe Advent is more about paying attention to where we have noticed God's presence and when we have felt God touch our lives over the past year, and about making our Christmas celebrations a response and a witness to the blessings we have experienced. God is there with us as we open gifts, and eat and drink and be merry, and enjoy – or endure – time spent with family members. We don't make a home for God – God has made a home for us – and it's important for us to pay attention and notice.

We often tend to think of our churches as a dwelling place for God – a place where we can find and be found by God – and certainly church is a place in which we feel the presence of God through the worship and the music and the sense of community and the educational programs.

Here at Christ & Holy Trinity there has been much energy and effort around the capital campaign. We have all been asked to participate in this effort to raise funds and expand the buildings in order to better house the many

fine programs that are and will be offered here. We are doing this because a greater number of needs can be met by having bigger and better space to use, to the glory and honor of God.

Some of us are feeling badly this year because the global economic situation has made it difficult to support Christ & Holy Trinity financially in the way that we would like. Some of us don't feel able to fulfill our pledge to the building fund and also support the operating budget of the church. And so we may corporately feel badly that economics and other issues have made it difficult to build "God's house" on the same time schedule as originally planned.

But if we go back to the lesson, and hear again that it is not that we are building this house for God, but that God is building this house for us, then we can trust that God, who has probably been behind this project from the beginning, has God's own timetable for this project, and that as prayerful people we can trust that God will move us to slow down or speed up progress toward the completion of the project. All we need to do is pay attention.

Advent is also a time when we have traditionally tried to prepare ourselves personally and spiritually for the coming of Christ, so that God may be born anew within us at Christmas. So we fast, and we pray, and we make commitments to care for ourselves better, and try to "keep the Christ in Christmas," in the hope that we will be ready, and pure, and an attractive abode for God, and therefore will experience God in a more profound way when Christmas arrives.

This Advent, as in many years past, I decided to once again try to eat a very "clean" diet of fruits and vegetables, protein and limited carbs and sugars in the hope that I would become a better steward of my body and a more acceptable dwelling place in which Christ could be born anew this Christmas. And my hope was that doing so would help me experience Christmas at a deeper level. Guess how successful I have been – especially since a good friend of mine sent me a gift package full of Tastykakes – the Cadillac of snack cakes from my home town of Philadelphia. And then the people at my office decided that this past week would be "goodies" week, which meant that people brought home-made baked goods to the office every day. I have not been very successful in denying myself this Advent, and was on the verge of feeling that I have not prepared myself adequately for the coming of Christ when I was reminded that I don't create the home for God – God is working inside of me, and inside of you, and is making a home inside of me, and inside of you, nudging each of us to continue becoming the person God created each of us to be. Paying attention to that is what will make each of our Christmas celebrations more profound this year.

So, as we enter these last few days of Advent, let us remember that Christmas is not about what we do, or what we don't do, or how we look, or how our homes look, or what we give, or what we can't give.

Christmas is about what God has done, and is doing – and our experience of this holiday will be more meaningful if we are able to pay attention to that.