

Column

EXPECTATION AND THE JOURNEY TO CHRISTMAS

Speaking at a conference, a wise clergyman advised those planning to visit elderly or shut-in persons to call a few days ahead to let them know they were coming. He went on to say that on the day of the visit it would be wise to ring them up again to remind them you were coming.

Why this advance notice? He went on to explain that expectation often creates as much pleasure as the actual happening. If you think about it, he is right. As a small boy, I remember my mother bringing out a picture book of the place we were going on vacation a few weeks before we left. We would look through the book almost every day. Those pictures generated expectation and made the actual trip more pleasurable. Travelling before in your mind was as much fun as making the actual road journey.

You might recall something similar happening in the weeks before Christmas. If you were like me, you would lie down flat on your belly in front of your pile of gifts under the tree and squeeze and shake them. You had a pretty good idea of what was concealed in the decorative paper in some, but in others you were clueless. As in anticipating a trip, expectation brought joy in advance.

Expectation is not just for children. It should be a part of everyone's experience regardless of their age. Advent, the season of the Church Year in which we now find ourselves, is likewise a vehicle for creating expectation. During the four weeks preceding Christmas Day, we look forward to the food, to the look on children's faces as they open their gifts and hopefully to the liturgical remembrance of the birth of the Christ child.

Going back to the experience of my childhood, in Advent we leaf through pages of the picture book of the place we shall be visiting. In so

doing, we get not just scenes of our Lord's coming 2000 years ago but also glimpses of His future coming at the end of the age.

These latter include fore-gleans of the renewed world that will follow our Lord's Second Coming. (Revelation 21:1-4). From these come hope. This present fallen world with all its misfortunes and injustices, tears and sorrows, partings and death, is not the final chapter in the Great Story of God and the world.

Someone is coming who will put all wrongs to rights. This knowledge brings expectation. This Someone is none than the same Jesus who at His first coming healed the sick, restored those tormented in mind, called all sorts to Himself, foretold the doom of those who ravished the poor, raised the dead and promised safe habitations for His people to dwell in.

The knowledge that history is not an endless circle but is going somewhere gives meaning and purpose. It causes us to get up each morning and get going. Israel's hope and consolation found in the Old Testament translates to our hope and expectation in the present.

The challenge is that not everyone will slow down long enough to look through the picture book in Advent. Many will be so busy with the trappings of the holidays that they miss the period of expectation and thus the joy of the arrival of the destination on Christmas Day.

May it not be so for us. The King is coming. He has sent us word in advance of His plan. Let us be eager, expectant and ready.

O LORD Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an

acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge,