

# FIRST

serving and proclaiming

2014 / Volume 1 / Issue 1

Advent

## PREPARE

*KEEPING ADVENT WITHOUT  
PEEKING AHEAD*

## A NEW NEWSLETTER

*AND WHAT YOU CAN DO  
TO HELP*

a seasonal publication of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

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*a seasonal publication of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church*

*Advent 2014*

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"Advent was formerly kept as Lent, but with less strictness. In the West fasting is no longer formally ordered, though festivities are discouraged and the solemn character of the season is marked by the liturgical use of purple...

"The season is observed as a time of preparation not only for Christmas but also for the Second Coming of Christ as Judge at the Last Day."

*from The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 21*

## St. Stephen's Leaders

### WARDENS

Craig McKee, James Willis

### VESTRY

Elinor Balensuela, Orbie Bryan, Anne Buchanan, Sandy Bush, James Campbell, Kim Streeter, Carolyn Steinbaugh

### TREASURER

Peggy Allen

### ORGANIST

Dennis Dieken

### DEACON

The Rev. Deborah J. Veach

### RECTOR

The Rev. Andrew Downs

### BISHOP

The Rt. Rev. Catherine M. Waynick

# FROM THE PULPIT

*by the Rev. Andrew D. Downs, Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church*

This time each year, we have a fight in my house about the tree. And the decorations. And the music.

My wife loves putting the tree up early. I like decorating it on Christmas Eve. She likes rocking out to the great Christmas music all through December. I find that, between the car radio and all of the stores, I'm pretty much sick of Christmas music about the time Christmas actually arrives. She wants to be full of the Christmas spirit. And I, well, might get confused for a Grinch.

I love Christmas. But I almost love Advent more. And in a hurry to get to Christmas, we might miss something special about this season.

When I was little, Christmas always seemed achingly far away. Then in a flurry of activity, it was here, we were in church, we were eating dinner, we were opening gifts, and by late afternoon, I was ready for the 26th. I was pretty selfish at 12. One year, I received a Sega Genesis video game system and was so excited and so happy. But by 3 or 4 in the afternoon, I was bored

with *Sonic the Hedgehog* and asked if we could go up to the video store to rent a game.

Christmas goes by fast enough already. I need the reminder to slow down.

This season of Advent is about slowing down. It is about observing. And it is about preparing. It is hard to do any of this when we are running around.

For most of us, the word ***prepare*** sounds like the seasonal norm. With all the shopping and planning and decorating and lighting and festive gatherings we have. It seems as if all we do for the month of December is prepare. Prepare for that one night and following morning that makes our year. Preparing for the dinners and gift giving. Maybe setting out a crock pot to prepare a Christmas morning breakfast. Preparing with lists and letters to Santa and Christmas cards and office parties.

The church, however, teaches that this preparation is more specific than we might think.

We prepare, not with presents and Christmas carols and the birth of a baby. We prepare with

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## KEEPING ADVENT WITHOUT PEEKING AHEAD

ourselves. We prepare to make ourselves a gift.

I never quite got this growing up. We gathered every year in this somewhat somber season, only to find ourselves coming to church late at night on the 24th of December to sing and pray and sing some more. The whole thing seemed glorious and filled with joy. And despite my selfish desire for free stuff from my parents, I came to enjoy that late worship a whole lot more.

I thought this whole thing was about preparing for Christmas. As if coming to church and hearing once again about this incredible baby with the shepherds and the stable and the inn was the whole story. That we prepared ourselves to just hear a story again. Or give gifts again.

Instead, we are taught that Advent is a season of preparation for *the next* coming. We prepare, not only for the baby, but for the Son of Humanity coming on a cloud. We prepare for GOD to come among us and change everything.

That's why we had those stories right before and



into Advent about preparing for the bridegroom and preparing for the master. We prepare, not for something that has *only* happened in the past but something that will happen again. Something that will involve, as Isaiah calls for GOD to "tear open the heavens". Not as a disaster movie, but so that GOD can be with us again.

Skipping Advent is like peeking at your Christmas presents. It ruins the anticipation *and* the unwrapping.

Peace to you and may you have a blessed Advent!

# TO SERVE

## A BUSY TIME OF YEAR

### Our Adopted Families

For the second year in a row, we have adopted four families through Salvation Army's *Adopt a Family* Program and have exceeded our commitment through generous giving. All presents must be returned to church by **December 7th**. We'll wrap after church!

### Christmas Flowers and Music

Each year, we collect funds for our Christmas flowers and music as thanksgivings or memorials to loved ones. If you would like to give and you have a box of offering envelopes, please use the pre-numbered envelopes included in your box and print or type your name, the names of those you wish remembered in the Christmas bulletin and return it in a Sunday offering or to the parish office by Sunday, **December 14**. Additional envelopes are available at both entrances to the church.

### Lessons and Carols!

The Farrington Grove Chorale will present Lessons and Carols in the church on **December 14** at **4 pm**.

### Celebration of New Ministry

Please join us Sunday, **December 21** at **5 pm** for a celebration of our ministry together and the installation of the Rev. Andrew D. Downs as the 20th Rector of St. Stephen's. Dinner will follow in the Great Hall. RSVP to Peggy Allen **no later than December 13** at [pegall@iquest.net](mailto:pegall@iquest.net) or 812.239.6826. And please consider bringing one dozen Christmas cookies for dessert!

### Formation Shaping Up for January

Our children's formation has grown and is providing new opportunities for our children and adults to share in the stories of the church in new and inventive ways! Now its time for the rest of us to join in! In January, we will gather for a formation forum: an opportunity to discuss and ultimately guide the direction of our formation and education programs for the year. We'll also kick off a congregation book study, a cool new Bible study called *The Biblical Wild* (see back cover), *Theology on Tap*, build new opportunities for youth. Stay tuned!

# TO PROCLAIM

## ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

**I am really excited to share with you** something new and old at the same time: a newsletter. Let me tell you what it is, why we need it, and where I hope it goes.

*First* is a seasonal newsletter that will (hopefully) be published online, in print for pick up, and mailed to our shut-ins for each season of the church year. It will take the season's theme for its theme and provide not only information of events, but instruction and reflection.

*First* will serve as a means of linking some of our existing internal communication with our external and evangelistic communication. It will not be comprehensive, but will strike a balance between forming and *informing*.

It will not replace our email newsletter, but will supplement it. Our weekly newsletter and website will still be the most up-to-date and accurate communication vehicles. *First* will be a different sort of publication.

The existing newsletter, *The Messenger* was last published in Lent. Though I have no trouble with that name, I thought of this new newsletter

as a reboot: we need a new name for a new newsletter.

Our book of saints, *Holy Women, Holy Men* says of St. Stephen:

By this appointment to assist the apostles, Stephen, the first named of those the New Testament calls "The Seven," became the first to do what the Church traditionally considers to be the work and ministry of a deacon.

Stephen went first in the serving and the proclaiming. We would be smart to follow his example.

*First* is about our serving and proclaiming. That means it can't be about me, but I've chosen to go first. I would love to help you share your story. For this is our resource, just as St. Stephen's is our church.

With love and peace,

The Rev. Drew Downs

# THE BIBLICAL WILD

*The Biblical Wild* is an interactive bible study for individuals, small groups, neighborhoods, and congregations where we will journey into the wilds of Holy Scripture through daily readings of the Old Testament and Psalms and weekly video reflections presented by **the Rt. Rev. Todd Ousley**, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan.



Visit the website at [thebiblicalwild.org](http://thebiblicalwild.org)!

## WORSHIP FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

### Advent

Sundays	8 am & 10 am	Holy Eucharist
Thursdays (4th, 11th, 18th)	noon	Holy Eucharist (in chapel)

### Christmas Eve

December 24

4 pm	Holy Eucharist with Carols
9 pm	Musical Prelude to Christmas Worship Christmas Festival of Lessons and Music with Holy Eucharist

### Christmas Day

December 25

10 am	Quiet Christmas Eucharist (in chapel)
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NOTE: Our Thursday service will be cancelled on January 1