

HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 11/29/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, November 30 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for our world as it faces the new omicron variant of the coronavirus. Ask God to provide medical solutions to this virus. Pray for those who suffer from this new variant and those who care for them. Seek to find ways to help our world fight and defeat this virus.*

Did you miss it? Did it slip by barely noticed? Did you pause before you rushed on to the important things that lie ahead?

I'm talking about Thanksgiving. While we probably took time to be with family and friends, with the pushing from merchants and movies and music, it was nearly easy to miss. (I've been hearing Christmas music since a few days before Halloween.) It almost seems sad that we need to have an official day of Thanksgiving rather than having a sense of thankfulness all the time. But it truly is sad that Thanksgiving anymore feels like the marker for the beginning of the Christmas shopping season. And there is so much that we try to pack in between now and Christmas.

This should be a time when, rather than rushing to Christmas, we slow down to enjoy and appreciate what these days are really about. For Christians, we are barely coming near to Christmas. We just began Advent—the time of waiting for the coming of the Christ child. But we just can't wait to get ready for Christmas, can we. It won't be until the week of Christmas that in worship we finally hear of Mary's visit to Elizabeth to celebrate their pregnancies. Yet, in so many ways, it feels like Christmas is already here

Advent is a season to consider God's response to the needs of the world. It is a time to realize and be thankful that God hears our cries and answers our call, both in the coming of Jesus two thousand years ago and today. It's important that we don't lose "Oh, Come, Oh Come Emanuel," by rushing to "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come." This is a wonderful and important time to slow things down and stretch out the journey from the beginning of Advent through Christmas that begins on December 25 until Epiphany on January 6.

When our children were little, my late wife Lori and I began a family tradition that sought to help them and our whole family enjoy these precious days. December 6 is the Festival of St. Nicholas. St. Nicholas took special interest in the needs of the children in the town of Myra where he served as bishop. When the family shoes were left outside in the evening to air out, he would place small gifts in them for the children. Lori and I would place a bag of (chocolate) gold coins in our children's shoes that night and on the next morning, they would receive one gift each. On Christmas Eve and Day, we would worship the Christ child and read the Christmas story at home. The birth of Jesus was our focus so we did not open gifts. (This was easier for the kids to take since they had already received a gift on St. Nicholas day.) Then on

Epiphany, January 6, when the church celebrates the arrival of the wisemen, everyone in the family received three gifts to remember the three gifts the wisemen brought to the Christ child. Stretching out the Advent to Christmas to Epiphany celebrations this way helped all of us to enjoy each season in its own unique way.

Maybe Christmas songs before Halloween has soured me a bit on all the Christmas trappings and music of this Advent season. Nevertheless, I hope you will take time to enjoy each season as we journey through it and not get so caught up in the rush to Christmas. Celebrate each day and what it means in the overarching story of God coming to live among us—God made flesh—Emanuel. Take time to be thankful each day for all that God has done and will do for us, and most of all for the gift of Christ who comes at the end of Advent and the beginning of Christmas.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey