

Weekly Musing † November 21, 2011



Pilgrims Going to Church by George Henry Boughton,
1833-1905

“Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.” That was written by John Milton who lived in the first three quarters of the 17th century. He was a Puritan. I understand he is not much read now because of his many classical allusions which the modern public does not understand. Puritans are not pilgrims, at least not exactly. At Thanksgiving we remember the pilgrims, most famously those who came over on the Mayflower. These were religious separatists who desired to break

away from the Church of England. The puritans were the most extreme Protestants of the English reformation. They were generally opposed by Elizabeth I and ridiculed by Shakespeare. They did not want to break away from the Church of England so much as they wanted the Church of England to become what they (the puritans) were. They had enormous influence but it is fair to say they did not prevail in the way they would have liked. The puritans in America, who had come here to escape persecution and to establish their own notion of what a church should be, became so intolerant they were an embarrassment to their puritan cousins in England.

It is worth noting both the puritans and pilgrims were devoted enough to their form of Christianity that they were willing to risk a dangerous voyage and the possibility of starving or freezing to death, which many of them did. Of course if we were paying attention in history class, we know America eventually became a polyglot of different religions, such as the Quakers, the Roman Catholics and the Anabaptists. Our local Hutterites (which my pagan spell checker does not recognize) are descendants of that latter movement. The anabaptists scared every established church and government because they were pacifists but worse yet, communists, people who lived in a commune and pooled their money.



This is all a prelude to Thanksgiving, a secular holiday with the deepest religious roots. There is no gift giving (hurrah!) but a meal shared with family and friends, and we give thanks to God for our many blessings.

Advent is the short sweet season that starts closest to the Feast of St. Andrew (the patron saint of golf and decent Scotch). It ends on Christmas Eve. The lections or readings appointed for the four Sundays in Advent concern the end of time, making a way in the wilderness for God (readings from Isaiah), and finally the strident call to repentance from St. John the Baptist (called the prodromos or fore runner). The last Sunday is the Sunday of Mary and the Annunciation of God's favor to his people in the person of Christ.

This year we again use blue for Advent to distinguish it from Lent. The use of colors in vestments has only recently been standardized. We begin lighting an Advent wreath on the first Sunday of Advent. The pink candle is for Gaudette Sunday. The Latin word gaudette means rejoice and it is part of the traditional Introit (opening phrase of the mass sung a cappella by the priest). The white candle in the middle is the Christ candle and is lit on Christmas Eve. The Introit often used in Advent is that of the great “O Antiphons” (O come, O come, Emmanuel).

Children are often given Advent calendars (at St. Luke's we give them in church and in the preschool). These calendars have a little door that children open on each day of December. A Jesse tree often appears in Advent art. This shows a tree coming forth from Jesse, the father of David. The tree culminates in Jesus since Christ is descended from him in the earthly sense.

Waiting is hard for children and increasingly hard for adults in a "give it to me now" society. Christianity is full of triumphalism and so is the world. Triumphalism means that we have won; hooray for us. Advent reminds us there is a "not yet" in Christianity. It reminds us the world is still broken and sinful, and we are part of those breaking it. It reminds us that we still need Jesus. It also invites us to slow down a bit (the Orthodox fast in Advent). "O Come O Come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel."

Annunciation from Sinai, late 12th century



News from St. Luke's

All women of St. Luke's are invited to a no host luncheon at the McCormick Cafe, 2419 Montana Avenue, on December 17th from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. We will be gathering in the private room in the back. We have been asked to order off the menu that our server will provide. This will eliminate having to stand in line to order. If you have any questions please call Nancy McManus at 256-9792. We hope you can join us for fellowship and fun.

Our annual thanksgiving eve service is this coming Wednesday at 7 pm. Last year we only had 9 people in attendance which includes me and the young people who helped with the readings. Father Jacob Knee tells me this is the case at St. Stephen's as well. This short sweet Eucharist at night is one of my favorites. I have always felt I have more to give thanks for than I should.



Ghent Altarpiece by Van Eyck 1420's

Our organ has given up the ghost. We expect to purchase a new electronic music synthesizer like the one we have only one that does a better job of mimicking an organ. These are no longer very expensive.

Our final giving for the ECW's Dress-a-Child raised over \$1,500. This is a big deal. We also gave more for the ETO offering than ever before. Don't forget the Christmas dinner and pageant on December 11 at 6 pm. The practice for the kids is on December 4 and 11, at 9 am. before church.



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