

First Sunday In Advent, November 30, 2014, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Various

“Andrew and Advent”

Today we really have much to be thankful for. We just finished celebrating Thanksgiving Day, and we are so very thankful for the fact that we are blessed to be a community of believers here at St. Andrew's who have successfully walked together through some difficult times. We move together into a new season – the season of Advent. You will notice that the church is decorated in purple, as are my vestments. We have the beautiful Advent Wreath lit and we have no flowers in the church – just greenery. Advent is all about preparing to celebrate the incarnation; the historical fact that God came to earth in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. As the Apostle John professed, the “Word” became flesh in order to teach and heal and come to the help of sinners by dying on the cross to take away the punishment we deserve so that we could have a relationship with God.

Advent is the time of the Church's year when we remember that God came to His people, but for the most part rejected Him and even put Him to death. It also marks the beginning of a new Church Year – as we move from Lectionary year A to B for Sundays, and from Year 2 to Year 1 in the Daily Lectionary – used for Morning and Evening Prayer.

Today is also the feast of our beloved St. Andrew, the Apostle – the Patron Saint of this wonderful congregation. The name "Andrew" comes from the Greek "**Ἀνδρέας**" (Andreas) which means 'manhood', 'manly' or 'valor'. Andrew Bar Jonah is the son of Jonah or John who was born in Bethsaida of Galilee. He was brother of Simon Peter. Both Andrew and Peter were fishermen and they lived in the same house at Capernaum (Mark 1:29).

In the Gospel of John we learn that along with the John the Apostle, Andrew was also a disciple of John the Baptist. It was the testimony of John the Baptist that first led Andrew and John to go and follow Jesus. They heard John the Baptist say "*I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.*" *The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him.*" (John 1:34-39) Andrew recognized Jesus as the Messiah, and rushed to introduce Him to his brother, Peter, (John 1:41). From that moment on the two brothers became Disciples of Jesus Christ.

It is said that Andrew was “the first called and the first chosen” by Jesus to be one of the Twelve; and in the various lists of Apostles given in the New Testament (Matthew 10:2-4); Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13) he is always numbered among the first four – Peter, John, James, and Andrew.

It was Andrew who had a hand in the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. It was Andrew who said: "*Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will*

First Sunday In Advent, November 30, 2014, Year B

they go among so many?" (John 6:9) Just a few days before Our Lord's death, some Greeks asked Philip if they could see Jesus, so Philip referred the matter to Andrew, possibly because he held greater authority, and then they both went and told Jesus. (John 12:20-22) Like the majority of the Twelve, Andrew is not named in the Acts of the Apostles, except in Acts 1:13 when the entire list of the Apostles is given and the order of the first four is "*Peter, John, James, Andrew*. He is not mentioned anywhere in the Epistles or in the Book of Revelation.

As one of the Twelve, Andrew was present at so much of the Lord's miracles and teachings. He was with Our Lord during His public life; he was present at the Last Supper; he witnessed the risen Lord and His Ascension. Andrew shared in the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit during first Pentecost, and he helped, amid threats and persecution, to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world. Jesus told these disciples just before He ascended to the Father from the Mount of Olives. He said "*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8)

We really have no other "rock solid proof" of the other works of St. Andrew, but tradition gives us a good idea. Eusebius, the Church historian, records Andrew's going from Jerusalem to Scythia, but there is no reliable information about the end of his life. Tradition says that he was tied to an X-shaped cross and suffered death at the hands of angry pagans. That cross is now known as "St. Andrew's Cross," which you can see on the cover of your white prayer book. Andrew was martyred during the reign of the Emperor Nero, on 30th of November, A.D. 60; and so we celebrate his feast today. Andrew is known as the patron saint of Scotland, Russia and Greece, with the flag of Scotland being the Cross of Saint Andrew. One of the most important things we can remember about our dear patron saint, Andrew, is that he is a great model for all of us in introducing people to Christ. He took the initiative to bring his brother, Peter to meet our Lord. We are called to do the very same thing, and introduce others to Jesus – so that we all can prepare for the day when Jesus comes again!

I find it incredibly ironic that as we begin the Season of Advent that St. Andrew's feast falls on this very day. As I mentioned that Andrew and John were followers of Jesus's cousin, John the Baptist, and it is John the Baptist who we should think of when we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming Celebration of Christmas! The Gospel of Matthew introduces us to John the Baptist when he warns everyone to "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*" *This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'*" (Matthew 3:2-4)

John the Baptist was apparently quite an interesting fellow. You might recall that he is the son of a Levitical priest of the Temple, Zacharias, who was married to Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. When Mary visited her cousin it was the baby John who leapt in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth when Mary approached bearing the unborn Jesus. John would recognize Jesus' greatness about 30 years later near the Jordan River, where he was baptizing people who were seeking forgiveness for their sins. The Gospel of John says that with similar

excitement he proclaimed the presence of the Messiah: “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'*” (John 1:29-30) John was apparently a simple man who lived a simple life “*John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.*” (Matthew 3:4) We don't know if John the Baptizer's followers lived the same way – but tradition tells us that his food is not what you might think it was. He lived a simple life eating the fruit of the carob tree (known as locusts) and date paste (wild honey). The food is not so wild when you see the actual meaning, but it is still quite simple, yet very plentiful.

His passion was to prepare the world for the coming Messiah, and it should be ours as well. He called on others to repent, or turn away from their sinful behavior, and begin to live new lives in the Messiah. He boldly identified those who were going through the motions of ritual – the Pharisees and Sadducees – calling them a “*brood of vipers!*” He was calling people to examine their lives and seek to change. He proclaimed the Messiah Jesus as the “*Lamb of God.*” Right here – he tells us not only who Jesus is – but he tells us why Jesus must die such a sacrificial death on the cross – for the sins of the whole world. Heaven is not something we earn or inherit just because of being in the family of Abraham, as some Jews thought, but through a decision to follow the Lamb of God, accepting His invitation to be Lord of our lives, and to leave sinful behavior behind.

There are those who are more likely to consider Jesus in their life if they hear about Jesus from someone they already know and trust. Personally, it means that the people you have the best chance of introducing Jesus to - are those who know you and trust you, whether family member, friend, or neighbor. Sharing Jesus' invitation is best when it happens through relationships that are already there – that already exist. It is through friendships and close relationships that people can truly evidence and experience the love of Christ. The two men – John the Baptist's disciples - who were present that day at the Jordan – went and told two of their family members. Andrew told his brother Peter – and John told his brother James. An example of relationships formed through relationships.

St Andrew never wrote a gospel or an epistle and never had one addressed to him. He is important because he responded to Jesus' call to follow Him and become a “fisher of men” instead of a catcher of fish. This message of preparation should be heard by all of us, as we get ready for Jesus. We are called to follow that example; to do the very same thing, and introduce others to Jesus – so that we all can prepare for the day when Jesus comes again!