



# The Messenger

December 2021

## Christmas Services

Friday, December 24th

Early Christmas Eve

7:00pm

Carols & Special Music

10:00pm

Christmas Eve

10:30am

Saturday, December 25th

Eucharist

9:00am

# Rector's Message

Violet or Blue? This question is the subject of annual debates at this time, mostly in clergy circles, about which is the “true,” or at least more appropriate, liturgical color for the season of Advent. I suspect that most of you who have spent any great length of time in the Episcopal Church are accustomed to Violet, as well as three purple candles and one pink on Advent wreaths. That is certainly the tradition I grew up with. But blue has been making a strong surge in recent years, and since I know you were losing sleep over this great debate, I thought I would do a little reporting on the source of it.

Liturgical colors in general have kind of an interesting history. In his book *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church*, scholar Laurence Hull Stookey notes that prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was not just a ton of formality to liturgical colors. White did seem like a festive color, violet was preparatory, red was for Pentecost, and green was selected for no other reason than it was a nice default color when there were not occasions for other colors. However, at the Council of Trent, held in the mid-1500s by the Catholic Church in response to the Reformation, it was decided to take firmer stances on liturgical and theological systems across the board, lest more reformers come along and cause upheaval.

Protestants did not get the memo on the system of liturgical coloration, so it was a bit of a free-for-all, with variations from place to place. Stookey explains that often the color did not matter so much as the material. The Diocese of Sarum in Southern England, for instance, switched out vestments for occasions based on “the shabby” vs. “the best”. There was also the matter of expense. Purple dye was costly and therefore not accessible to all churches. Later, cultural differences also affected liturgical colors, as Stookey notes white is the color of joy in the West, but missionaries to Asia found that it was regarded as a color of mourning.

What the Violet vs. Blue debate really boils down to, though, is how the season of Advent is interpreted theologically. Long regarded as a season of penitence, as well as preparation, Advent finds many parallels with the season of Lent beyond the simple fact that both share a liturgical color. I won't delve into all of them, but one of the more compelling markers of Advent's penitential nature is found right in the *Book of Common Prayer*. In his November 2016 article for *Living Church*, "Is Advent a Penitential Season?", Fr. Bryan Owen notes that the Collects for Advent, especially weeks one and two, all point to repentance.

But Advent doesn't *feel* penitential, one might say. And that is kind of the impetus behind the "Blue Movement", if you will. Advent themes of watching, waiting, and the joy of anticipating the great light overcoming darkness are brought to the forefront. Therefore, ditch the gloom of Lent associated with violet and embrace the beauty of blue (they are beautiful vestments, no doubt). There is historical precedent for blue dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps earlier. Blue was the liturgical color for Advent in the Sarum Rite, the rite that informed much of the liturgy in early Prayer Books. You might even hear the term Sarum Blue used to describe blue advent vestments.

Fr. Owen points out that the moods for Advent, like Lent, are subject to a both/and interpretation. Just because one is penitential, allowing their heart to prepare Him room, doesn't mean they cannot experience joy. He cites liturgical scholar Leonel Mitchell, author of the textbooks on Episcopal liturgy, who points out that penitence is not the only Lenten theme either. There is also joy, love, renewal, and hope as we anticipate the rising of Jesus Christ again on Easter.

For me, in terms of colors I am ambivalent, though I find blue Advent candles ugly. Unto each their own. Theologically, I think what the lectionary presents for scripture readings during Advent points to a more profound, perhaps third option: a celebration of the already/not yet. Advent is a time where we

not only prepare for the Christ child to be born, the already, but also simultaneously call to mind our anticipation of Chris's second coming and the consummation of all things, the completion of God's purpose, the not yet. Somewhere in that collision of space and time, I believe there is room for both joy and repentance, which are key elements of the overarching message of Advent: Hope.

I hope that you have a very blessed and prayerful Advent season, and I hope you lean into the themes that feed your spirit most, regardless of the color.

Peace,  
Fr. Brian

### ***Blue Christmas Service***

Blue Christmas Services have grown in popularity in the last twenty years or so. No, they have nothing to do with the liturgical colors of the opening article nor the song made famous by Elvis (though I suspect it had some role in the naming). Blue Christmas, which we will be observing in the context of Evening Prayer, is an acknowledgement that the Christmas season is not always joyful and triumphant for people. There is loss, hardship, and hurt that makes this time of year difficult. The liturgy of Blue Christmas allows us to call these hardships to mind and offer them to God as we seek the hope found in the coming Christ, who makes all things new.

The Blue Christmas service will be held in-person and online on Wednesday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00 p.m. in lieu of our usual Wednesday evening virtual Compline.

### ***Advent Study Opportunities***

The *Living Compass* Advent devotionals are here. You may pick one up in the narthex or stop by the church office. If you contact the office, I have even been known to deliver. Otherwise, you can download a PDF version for free from [livingcompass.org](http://livingcompass.org).

At 7:00 p.m. on Thursday evenings throughout Advent, I will be conducting a group study on Zoom. We will be working with the book *Names for the Messiah* by Old Testament scholar and prolific author, Walter Brueggemann. This book is available on Amazon for about \$12, or the Kindle version is about \$9. Our first session will be the evening of December 3. I look forward to joining you in conversation.

### ***This and That***

***December ECW First Friday*** All women of Grace are invited to join in on our last meeting of 2021. Say a little prayer that nothing will keep us from getting together on Friday, December 3rd, at 11:30. Please bring your own lunch. We have a Christmas activity planned and could use your help! If you have any unused Christmas cards with envelopes, please bring them. If you have any questions, please give me a call.

"May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you." 2 Thessalonians 3:16

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***Hanging of the Greens*** - Sunday, December 19th after the 9:00am service.

***Deadline*** for the January Newsletter is January 20th

***Annual Meeting, January 23rd, 2022*** All reports for the meeting need to be turned into the office no later than January 14th either electronically (gracechurch@aeroinc.net) or printed in a format ready to be copied for the annual report.

***Weekly Altar Flowers for 2022*** Sign up sheet is now posted in the narthex. The cost of altar flowers is \$33.00 (Deininger Floral notified us that this is due to their increasing prices along with supply and demand.) Sometime during the month you are signed up for weekly flowers turn in a check for \$33.00 (made out to Grace Episcopal Church). You can put this in the offering plate, turn in to the office or mail to the church. Just indicate on the check that it is for altar flowers.

***Christmas Flower Donation*** It is time to place our order with the florist for the wreaths and flowers that decorate our walls and doors for the Christmas season. We depend on your donations to cover the cost of the wreaths and plants, and it is, at the same time, an opportunity for a special remembrance of your loved ones, or a celebration of God's blessing in your life. During the week following Christmas the plants are delivered to homes and nursing homes carrying thoughts and love from Grace Church. There is an envelope included in this Messenger. Please send your donation for flowers along with any names or intentions to be remembered at the Christmas Service.

## *December Birthdays & Anniversaries*

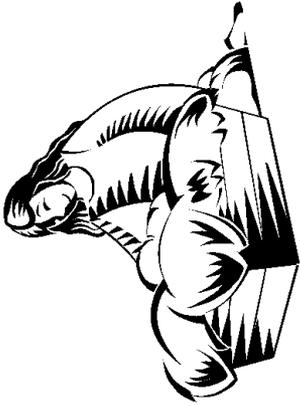
1st	Heather Becker	17th	Bernard Lischwe
3rd	Brian Chesterton		Doris Chesterton
4th	Duane Price	20th	Charlie Prall
5th	Dick Worthington	21st	Mary Lockwood
6th	Marilyn Hepner		Elizabeth Maize
10th	Steve Holbert	23rd	Carol Price
13th	Rita Ayre	24th	Allison Gush
14th	Elizabeth Woodward	30th	Mark Helm
	Nicole Bolotnik		

28th Neil & Rose Dreier

*Merry Christmas & Happy New Year*

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Merry  
Christmas



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