

**The Rev. T. Stewart Lucas
St. Margaret's Church
December 21, 2008
Advent IV B**

In the name of the one who was and is and is to come, AMEN.

I was attending a diocesan meeting exactly six years ago this week across the table from a young lady who was eight and a half months pregnant. She was glowing of course with an incredible sense of expectancy, and I asked her, "Are you ready?" "No," she said, "I'll never be prepared, I've done all I can do. Now we're just enjoying the wait."

That woman was Dina van Klaveren, and we had just met and we were working on a committee together before she went to seminary. She was then pregnant with Everett. She taught me something that day that was so important. I will never forget that lesson.

Enjoy the wait. I thought that was sermon material. I could ask you if you are ready for Christmas, but I know what the answer would be. We are never fully ready are we? There's always something else we could do. We could buy one more present, put one more ornament on the tree, find one more corner to stick some holly and some ivy. But I don't think we can ever be fully prepared for the coming of Christ into our hearts and homes.

We do get overwhelmed with the preparations though don't we? Advertisements and department stores don't help to ease our anxiety either. Buy just one more toy for the kids. Cook another cake just in case someone drops by. Spend just a little bit more money. But the ads don't encourage us to just sit down and enjoy the wait.

This morning we hear the story of the annunciation, when the angel Gabriel comes to tell Mary that she is pregnant with the Son of God, the Messiah. We can all imagine how startling that day must have been for the Virgin Mary. She too was probably overwhelmed with worry over how this would be perceived by many around her. What did she need to do to get ready?

But as we gather for this last Sunday of Advent and Christmas is within our reach, I wondered if the other Mary that we find along with her sister Martha in the tenth chapter of Luke might have something to say to us this morning. You remember that wonderful story when Martha is busy in the kitchen getting ready for Jesus to come over for dinner, and Mary does nothing but sit at the feet of Jesus and listen. This infuriates Martha and she wants Jesus to chastise her sister. Jesus does nothing of the sort though. Instead he praises Mary for enjoying the wait. That Mary was present with Jesus, experiencing his teaching and his gift of love.

I've preached about it before. Each one of us struggles with this dilemma daily. Sometimes it's easier to get busy in the kitchen than it is to just sit and wait. But maybe this morning God is begging us to us to be still and know that Christ is coming into our midst. If we don't come out of the kitchen, we're going to miss the main event.

These next few days we can sit around, eat, drink, and be merry, and tell those great old stories of Christmases past. About fifteen years ago, my parents and I came home from the five o'clock Christmas Eve service to a good portion of my grandparents' house up in flames. I don't know if any of you have ever experienced part of your life going up in smoke. It changes you life. My grandfather had left the turkey smoker a little bit too close to the cedar sided house. The old propane line was brittle and was shooting a flame directly into the wood. They lost their entire bedroom wing and the attic portion of their house.

That is certainly a Christmas we will never forget. We lost some presents and some family heirlooms and antiques in the attic, but in a weird way it was one of the best Christmases we ever had. Our lives were refocused by tragedy. We remembered what the whole season was really all about. We were present with each other like we had never been before. We were reminded of God's presence that carried us through that difficult time, and the love of our community.

These next days we can sit around and enjoy the presence of those about us, remembering that if we get too caught up in the preparations and decorations, we may miss the entire point. These next few days we can revert to our childhood days when we didn't worry as much about the perfect gift. We just made a personal card. We didn't worry about making it to every party, we just made gingerbread people. We didn't let our cynical misgivings get the best of us; we just played with grandma's nativity set and wanted to ride around and look at the Christmas lights.

Ironic that God came into the world as a baby isn't it? Isn't it interesting that our God, who created this amazing universe and hung the stars and the planets and then decided to come among us as a baby? And then Jesus grew up and taught his disciples that "You cannot enter my kingdom unless you turn and become as a little child." Unless you put aside all of your worries and your preparations in the kitchen and come to me as a little child, you cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

But "at the heart of our culture is the story that the only way to get smart, to become wise, is to grow up, to become big, self-sufficient, smart, objective, detached, old."ⁱ Yet in stark opposition to our surrounding world, "the heart of the Christian faith is the story that the only way to become wise is to become small, to turn, to return to the vulnerability and naiveté of childhood, to become dependent, open; in short, *to revert*."ⁱⁱ

Perhaps this is just the way for us to experience the next few days, to revert to being a child. During this Christmastime, it's perfectly okay for us to act like five year olds with a twinkle of amazement in our eyes as we make our way to the manger. The babe in that manger in Bethlehem reminds us that we are not quite as mature and intelligent and self-sufficient as we would like to think. We are children, and we become obedient to Jesus' invitation to return and enter the "kingdom of the small door."ⁱⁱⁱ We sit and enjoy the wait for the gift that is to come in the manger basking in the presence of our children.

Gracious God, let our preparations will be enough so that now we can let go and enjoy the wait. Amen.

ⁱ Willimon, William H. *Pulpit Resource*. Vol. 30, No. 4. page 52.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.* p. 52-3.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.* p.52.