

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### The Rev. Jim Young



The Rev. Jim Young is canonically resident in the Diocese of Southwestern Virginia. In the spring/summer of 2019, he discerned a call to serve as a missionary for the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf. Fr. Young serves as the chaplain of Christ Church, Jebel Ali (in the emirate of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates). It is a dynamic parish with congregants from all over the world. He moved there with my wife and pets in August 2019 and is thoroughly enjoying the challenge and opportunity to live out the good news of Jesus Christ.

### GOSPEL—MARK 1: 1-8

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

<sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.”

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

### REFLECTION

I love that phrase: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Advent is a time of beginning...a time filled with hope, longing and dreams. After all that has happened this past year, many of us are longing for a new beginning. We are longing and dreaming of good news. In the midst of the frenetic rush of the holidays, we long for something more.

Several years ago, I came across a comic strip that, to me at least, captures the essence of the busy-ness of this often frantic and chaotic time of year. This year...2020...poses its own unique challenges and chaos...uprooting and upending many of our cherished traditions, longings, and dreams. No doubt, many of you have heard or seen the comic previously. If so, please bear with me as I briefly describe it. The cartoon portrays a carload of people traveling down a snowy highway. The kids are yelling and screaming at each other. The parents also get in on the act,



screaming, bickering... tempers flaring. Everyone is annoyed and short-tempered. Finally, in an act of desperation, the mother suggests that they start singing together: "...over the river and through the woods. To grandmother's house we go..." In the last frame, you can see the car turning into a driveway. There, peeking out of a window are the faces of an elderly couple. Grandmother shakes her head and says to granddad: "We move over the hills and through the woods and yet they still find us!"

The story is meant to be humorous and, for us, as we look back over the past year...it seems to harken back to simpler times when we could anticipate and long for family gatherings or time with friends. Those times, however, are not possible, given the present state of our world and lives. My wife and I, for instance, have been in Dubai since August 31<sup>st</sup>. Due to the crisis in our world, we long and dream of time with friends and family back home but the days of easy travel and the freedom to travel as one pleases is beyond our control. In the meantime, we are developing new friends and an extended family here from all parts of the world.

However, the question remains...At this time of year, have you ever felt that way? Have you sought time away to relax, to escape and simply chill out from the hustle and bustle of life. Things are hectic...things are busy. We are tired. We are frustrated. Many of us are experiencing pandemic fatigue. That has certainly been true in my life and in the life of my family over the course of the last year. Our lives have been turned upside down as we have been challenged to develop new routines...new ways of being...new ways of interacting. We have had to let some things go. We have had to let some dreams and longings go due to the limitations of our times and circumstances.

Yet, here in Advent, we are once again at the beginning of another liturgical year. It is a time of new beginnings, new longings, new dreams. The past year has certainly not been one that I, nor anyone else for that matter, had anticipated. For example, here...in Dubai, we do a great many weddings at Christ Church. These couples come from all over the world. And, just for a slight bit of context, we limit weddings, during this crisis, to the couple, two witnesses, a photographer...and of course, the friendly yet slightly eccentric neighborhood priest. At the ceremony, all of us are wearing face masks and following appropriate guidelines. I often jokingly tell couples that I know that this is not how they anticipated their wedding day. No, it's not because I have developed a keen sense of intuition after being a priest for close to 24 years. Or that God has revealed this truth to me in a dream. I simply point to the masks that we are all wearing as proof. Although there is a long tradition of the bride being veiled, I remind them...on this day, we are all veiled. We are all veiled but simply in a very untraditional fashion. We are beginning new traditions, it seems. I follow up by telling them that if this was indeed how they imagined and dreamed of this special day...with all of us wearing masks...then I have an excellent therapist to whom I can refer them.

However, these couples, like us, have been given a precious gift during these uncertain times. It is the gift of treasuring each moment. No matter how much we plan and attempt to anticipate, there is much beyond our control. If it is not one thing, it will be another. Control is an illusion or perhaps it is better described as a delusion. Instead, we are invited on a journey and to place our trust in the loving embrace of Jesus Christ.

As the journey continues, as we place our trust in the living God, we are invited to live into the eternal now. Or, as [Jean-Pierre de Caussade](#) writes, we are invited to enter into the sacrament of



the present moment. And, as we listen to the movements of the Holy Spirit all around us, as we engage with and live with our sisters and brothers from around the globe, we are invited to enter into their dreams and hopes. Then, we are invited to enter into the hopes, longings and dreams that God has for each one of us...for each woman, man, and child. God loves us all. God's dreams embrace love, mercy, forgiveness, peace, dignity and justice.

During this season we are awakened once again. Advent is a time when our capacity to dream in new ways is awakened once more. It is indeed a time of new beginnings...“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” And, when the world as we know it ends, that's when the dreaming must begin.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Emily Dickinson was born on December 10, 1830. She wrote: "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul." Where is your hope? What is perching on your soul? In a related vein, and in your humble discernment, what is God's hope for you and for the world at the current moment? What is your hope for this new chapter in our lives as a nation and as the people of God? How might your hope and God's hope align and work in tandem?
2. As Christians, we are invited to welcome the strangers in our midst. "Often, often comes the Christ in the stranger's guise." – Gaelic rune. As God's people, we are invited to remember that we, too, were once strangers and refugees. Yet, we were taken in by God and welcomed as beloved children of God. What would it mean to "love the alien as yourself" in our own community? How does the "beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ" look to those who are excluded and left out? How are you being invited to welcome the stranger, to incarnate the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ to them?
3. Where in your life do you need a new beginning, to experience new life, new birth? What are your dreams? During this season of Advent, what is awakening deep within you?

