



It's all about US!

Part of our journey through the Advent season is the inevitable journey down memory lane as we reflect on, and in some way relive the experiences of Christmases past. It is not difficult to evoke those memories, because the reminders of Advent and Christmas are all around us. We come to church and see the Advent Wreath and Candles, and images and feelings about Christmas suddenly invade our hearts and minds.

We go to the mall and hear a particular Christmas Carol and are transported back to a time or place when that carol had special meaning. Or someone asks us, "What was the best Christmas gift you ever received?" And we wrack our brain to remember which gift stands out most in our mind. From our remembrances, it may seem that Christmas really is all about us as individuals ... and the things that have particular meaning for us as individuals.

My own memories of the best Christmas gifts I ever received are twofold: the first was the Road Race Set that my brother and I received when we were 10 and 12 years old. That set was given to BOTH of us by two smart people, our parents, who knew that such things were best when shared ...after all it takes two to race! The hours we spent racing those cars around that track were numerous and further strengthened the bond between us as brothers!

The other best gift was given to my wife Cindy and me when we were both serving in parishes and were run off our feet with the busyness of the Advent/ Christmas season. A member of my parish, along with her daughters, came to our house and cleaned it from stem to stern so that we had one less thing to worry about in the midst of the busyness of our lives. Their gift of tangible help to Cindy and I strengthened our relationship with one another ... and enabled us to focus on the Christmas celebrations in our parishes.

As I reflected on these two gifts I realized that what made them special was that they were not given to us as individuals but to us as brothers in the first case, and to us as spouses in the second. And in both cases, they served to strengthen us in our relationships with one another! So too, God's gift to us in Christ is not simply the promise of hope and salvation for us as individuals ... but more importantly for us and all people in who are part of families, churches, and communities of every sort.

One great song of Christmas (*and I don't mean 'Jingle Bell Rock'*) proclaims the Good News of Christ's birth in a consistent manner: "*Unto US a child is born ... unto US a King is given*" ... proclaiming for all to hear that God has come in Christ Jesus to set ALL people free ... and to heal and strengthen relationships of every sort ... between individuals and even between nations! Indeed, God's gift of the Messiah, OUR Messiah, is meant for all of us ... for all people!

May our Advent and Christmas journey be filled with that spirit of community ... and with the realization that Christmas is all about US ... especially God's love for ALL people in Christ Jesus!

Peace, *Pastor Jim*

Our Sunday, December 24th Services are as follows:

9:30 a.m. - Fourth Sunday in Advent - Eucharist

7:00 p.m. - Choral Christmas Eucharist

9:00 p.m. - Family Christmas Eucharist

CITY-WIDE CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICE, December 25th

10:00 a.m. at St. John, The Evangelist Anglican