



Diocese of the
MID-ATLANTIC
Anglican Church in North America

December 8, 2016

Dear Friends,

Advent is a time of preparation, a time of anticipation, a time of waiting. You probably know the old saying: “absence makes the heart grow fonder.” That may be true, but biblically we should say that it’s really *abstinence* that makes the heart grow fonder.

Our culture says you prepare for something by having it now. But God’s way is to prepare by waiting. When it comes to preparing for Christmas, the culture says the best way to prepare is to experience it now. Christmas in the season that the culture says lasts from midnight on Black Friday until Christmas Day.

But Advent is the Church’s way of showing us how to prepare. We prepare by waiting, by praying, by reading Scripture, by looking forward. That’s why we traditionally don’t sing Christmas carols in Advent, but we instead sing about preparing for the Lord, in hymns like “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

Advent lasts until Christmas Eve. Then the Christmas season *begins*, a season of 12 days—hence the song. Our culture encourages us to overfill Advent with Christmas carols and Christmas parties, and *more* Christmas parties, so when Christmas finally arrives we’re ready for it to be over. But here is God’s pattern, which the Church expresses in Advent: Prepare by waiting. Save the experience until it is time.

I’m not advocating a legalistic approach, let alone a bah-humbug attitude toward Christmas. Quite the opposite. I’m encouraging us to experience the fullness of Jesus’ coming by deferring the celebration. Let Advent be a time of preparation, of prayer and Scripture, then enter into the great joy of Christmas when it arrives, not just for a day, but for the full season of those 12 days.

Follow God’s pattern and I guarantee that you won’t be sick of Christmas at 2:00 Christmas afternoon.

But please note that this is God's pattern in much more than Advent and Christmas. "Prepare by waiting" is God's pattern for our lives: Save sex until marriage. Save money and buy when you can afford it. Wait, and you will know a richness, a joy that you will never find if you try to have it all now.

Remember, abstinence makes the heart grow fonder.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a plus sign followed by the name "John" in a cursive script.

The Rt. Rev. John A. M. Guernsey