

# **The Beginning of Good News**

Sermon notes for the sermon

Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young

On Sunday, December 4, 2011

On Friday, November 25<sup>th</sup> of this year, shoppers spent over 50 billion dollars setting a new record high for holiday sales on Black Friday. The following Monday consumers spent almost 2 billion dollars for on-line purchases and set another all-time high holiday sales record for Cyber Monday. For those who make their living from retail sales it was the beginning of good news for an otherwise dismal year of sales. Some businesses will not weather the storms of the financial challenges of these times; others will get by to see another year.

Today, thousands of children will die from hunger, exposure, and disease while parents sit weeping at their bedsides. Homes and streets and schools wait to be rebuilt or rehabilitated in Haiti. Entire villages, leveled by the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, continue to lie in ruins; while nuclear waste awaits cleanup and containment. Thousands, if not millions, who have lost all hope in government fill the parks of cities around the world pointing out the disparity between the wealthy and the poor and pleading for reform. Where do we find the beginning of their good news? Is it found in the hope that food and water and shelter will come? How about the hope that nuclear contamination will be cleaned up quickly allowing people to return to their homes and businesses? Or, maybe the

beginning of good news is found with the thought that if we yell loud enough and make enough of a nuisance of ourselves that someone in charge will listen and begin to do something about it?

Throughout my ministry I have always struggled with the disparity between how American society prepares to celebrate Christmas and the call of the prophets during Advent to prepare ourselves to receive a Savior. Our society shouts "buy, spend, go into debt if you really love your loved ones." Rush with the crowd; push and shove; grab and clutch on to the newest gadgets; do whatever it takes to get the prized possession even if it means clearing away with pepper spray so you can be the first to own the biggest flat screen TV or the latest game system. Then we come to worship God for an hour and a half and hear the prophets of Israel shouting prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the dessert a highway for our God. And we hear the story of John the Baptist and the pilgrimage of people from Jerusalem to the country side by the Jordan River. It is usually the other way around with the country side coming to Jerusalem but in the beginning of good news for us those in the holy city travel to the side of the river to hear/see this spectacle of a man. I am certain that many came to see John the Baptist because word had spread about him and his message. Many came out of curiosity just as we slow down our cars to look at an accident. John's message was a simple one – if you want to be saved (from Roman rule; from corrupt religious leaders who look out for themselves; from the struggles of life that threaten to undo your family and you; from whatever is holding you down) come

and be baptized, be washed clean, have the filth of this life washed off of you; turn your backs on this way of life and prepare to follow your savior; the one who is coming to free us from the traps and snares of this world that we might live our lives in God's holy presence.

Many of you may not be aware that the observance of Advent and Christmas were the last to be included in the Church's liturgical year. They were not added until sometime in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. What was important for the Church was the great triduum – Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. All the other celebrations and festivals of the Christian liturgical year were added as they became understood and seen through this great observance of the Church. Advent and Christmas find their place in our liturgical life together when seen in the reality of Easter. "Christ the Savior is born" is much more than just a nice Christmas carol; it signifies to us that we need a savior and that savior comes to us today, in this moment.

The beginning of good news for us today is found not at the shopping mall or the on-line virtual stores but in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus and Jesus alone is our only hope. The most precious gifts are not the ones we buy for our loved ones but the one that is given by our loving God to a world that so desperately needs to be loved. Prepare now a place in your life, in your heart to receive your savior, the only Son of the living God.