

HOMILY ON ADVENT THREE; LESSONS AND CAROLS; BY LYNN E CUNNINGHAM  
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1. There are several ways that God finds his way into our lives.
  - a. One way lies in those times when a person is alone, and thoughtful and becomes aware of the gentle presence of something holy around and within them.
  - b. Another way lies in times spent with friends and the people we love. Often, something happens in these times, and a sense of the Holy Presence can begin to come over us.
  - c. The liturgy time in church can be another way, when the spoken prayers, and music, and the Lord's Supper begin to reveal that special presence of the Holy One.
  - d. Listening to the scriptures together, and studying them in community is yet another way.
  - e. God works in all these ways together to bring us closer to Him.
  - f. Today in this service, we will listen together to sacred scripture as it is read out loud.
2. The texts we will hear today all direct our prayers and thoughts to the coming of the Christ child into the world.
3. We are invited to listen to the ancient Hebrew account of our creation as human beings, and what God intended for his human creatures.
4. We will hear several passages from the books of the prophets Isaiah and Micah foretelling how God will come to restore and save his people with a special friend and counselor.
5. Finally, we will hear, from the Gospel of Luke the story of the annunciation to Mary by the angel Gabriel that she will bear the Son of the Most High God.
6. Recently, I read a sort of biography of the Bible by Karen Armstrong, who has become a well known scholar of religion and the Bible. She tells how the Bible came to be written and how it has been read over the centuries by different communities of people.
  - a. She points out that some of the early rabbis who studied the Hebrew Bible were well aware that the scriptures provide different accounts of the same thing, and that different passages of the Bible seem to conflict with each other. For example, there are two accounts of the creation of the world at the beginning of the Book of Genesis.
  - b. The early rabbis did not read the Bible as if it were a manual, like a manual providing instructions for repairing a car or some other piece of equipment.
  - c. Instead, the early rabbis read the differing texts in the Bible as if they were parts of an ongoing conversation among the different figures, such as Abraham, Moses, and the different prophets. By reading the scriptures, these rabbis began to understand that they too were part of a living conversation.
  - d. Indeed for many rabbis, when the community sat down together to study scripture, these figures, Abraham, Moses, and the others, were felt to be actually present with them in the study itself.
  - e. So, for many communities of Jews or Christians, studying and listening to the Bible together in community, as we are doing today, has long been a way of coming into the presence of the Holy Spirit, because the Bible itself was written to bring God's word into our present day lives.
7. Rowan Williams, Archbishop in Canterbury, reaches a similar conclusion in the book that our Bible study class has been working with for several weeks, the introduction to Christian belief, which he titles, "Tokens of Trust".
  - a. Rowan discusses what church is at its best, and he explains the role of the Bible and reading the Bible in church.
  - b. He quotes Martin Luther, who said that "the Bible is about you".
  - c. The Bible, he writes, is best read in community, as we do today, not just in

private, because in the Bible, God is telling us what is our history, and what is our identity as a people.

- d. When these lessons are read today, I urge you to listen to them as the telling of your own story, our own story.
  - e. When we gather as church, we share not just in the bread and the wine, but also in listening to the Bible, the stories in the Bible. We can listen to them not as things from long ago and far away, but as hearing something about our own story.
  - f. In reading the Bible together, we can recognize that our community of Dubois belongs in the same frame of reference as the whole history of God's dealing in the world. Abraham Moses, Ezekiel, and Isaiah stand invisibly along side us today.
8. Listen now to the prayer which leads us this morning into this sacred conversation with the scriptures.