

A Fitting End to the Celebration of the Incarnation: The First Sunday after the Epiphany at the Church of the Advent of Christ the King, San Francisco

One of the oldest congregations in the Diocese of California, the Church of the Advent was organized in 1858, a decade in which San Francisco's population increased by 67 per cent. Within two years the new congregation erected its first church building. At that time, the parish had nearly 400 communicants, and was flourishing in a prosperous neighborhood south of Market Street. By 1885, San Francisco had undergone a series of changes that transformed the neighborhood around the church into an industrial area. The parish moved to another building, but debt continued to mount. By the turn of the century, Church of the Advent had transformed from a dynamic new parish to a struggling congregation in a heavily blighted urban area.

The parish's new rector, formerly of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, San Francisco, accepted the position with assurance that he would have a free hand in regard to both finance and liturgy. Almost overnight, Church of the Advent became an Anglo-Catholic parish, a tradition which continues to this day. By the time he stepped down in 1905, the congregation was looking forward to a healthy future.

In 1906, however, the church building was completely destroyed during the massive earthquake and subsequent fire that struck San Francisco. In the midst of severe adversity, Advent secured a portable building for worship service, and was one of the first burned-out churches to resume regular services in the wake of the earthquake. The congregation used relief money to buy a site on Fell Street, where the current church now stands. St. Thomas Church, New York City, sent the parish new communion silver as part of a relief effort. The current church building was actually planned to be the parish hall, and "temporary" services were held beginning Christmas Day, 1910. The building was finally consecrated on January 1, 1944, and plans for further building abandoned.

This church building seats approximately 110 people, with windows made entirely of amber glass, as this was the only glass available after the 1906 earthquake. A rectory apartment is located directly above the church. A two-story parish hall completes the compound, which encloses a small garden. Advent sits in the middle of a neighborhood known as the Hayes Valley, a triangle which is bounded by one of the more questionable portions of Market Street to the south, and San Francisco's Civic Center to the north (including City Hall, the War Memorial Opera House, and Davies Symphony Hall). The United Nations charter was signed here in 1945, in what is now known as the Herbst Theatre. Hayes Valley itself is a trendy arts neighborhood, with cafes, galleries, and numerous new apartment buildings.

In 1918, a pandemic of influenza took the lives of many parishioners, including the rector, who had only arrived in February of that year. In 1921, Advent's vestry invited the monks of the Society of St. John the Evangelist (Cowley Fathers) to establish a house at Advent and serve the parish. In addition to serving the needs of Advent's members for two decades, the brothers also served as chaplains to the inmates at Alcatraz and taught at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, the seminary in nearby Berkeley. The Society strengthened Advent's Anglo-Catholic practice, emphasizing order, prayer, and devotion to God through the sacraments. Under their leadership, the parish began to use the name "Church of the Advent of Christ the King." The Cowley legacy continues to this day; there has rarely been a day when Mass has not been celebrated at Advent's altar.

In the early 1980s, worship and devotions according to *The People's Anglican Missal* and *St. Augustine's Prayer Book* were replaced by *The Book of Common Prayer*, with services conducted in contemporary language, and the altar was moved away from the reredos so that celebrants face the congregation—changes that are described in the parish's history as “not without controversy.” In 1984, the illness that came to be known as AIDS was beginning to affect a number of parishioners. Over a ten-year period, more than 100 members of the congregation died of AIDS-related illnesses, and the church was often the site of multiple Requiem Masses in a given week. To fill the void left by AIDS, women began to take over responsibilities previously carried out by men only, including the addition of a female deacon to the staff. The parish currently lists nine nonstipendiary clergy—seven priests and two deacons. One of the priests is a woman.

The parish now has a modest endowment fund, which helps make possible its impressive music program. In addition to employing a four- or five-voice choir each Sunday, the parish celebrates the major feasts with a High Mass in the Evening—including these Prayer Book major feasts: Epiphany, Annunciation, Ascension, and All Saints. The parish also observes Corpus Christi on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday and the feast of the Assumption with a solemn Mass. Low Mass is celebrated daily, and lay-led Evening Prayer is offered six days a week. Twice a month, a Latin chant Mass is celebrated on Saturday evening. This uses a locally produced Latin translation of the Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer*.

In addition to high-quality music, social outreach is another of the hallmarks of Advent. The parish has strong ties to the Episcopal Sanctuary, a shelter for homeless men and women. Volunteer members serve meals, conduct worship and Bible study, and host a lunch every Tuesday for Sanctuary residents.

Entering the austere Spanish-baroque building on January 9, 2011, a visitor is greeted with a warm smile, and handed a packet of five items: a service bulletin, printed announcements, plus separate leaflets for music, a Litany of the Saints, and the Renewal of Baptismal Promises. To participate fully, worshipers also need to consult *The Hymnal 1982*, which is found in the pew rack.

A large bell in the garden tolls to indicate that worship is about to begin, while several parishioners kneel in prayer and light candles at one of three shrines—two by the altar rail, one devoted to Christ the King, one to St. Mary the Virgin, and one in the entrance vestibule, a statue of Our Lady of Walsingham. Of the thirty or so gathered, about one-third are accompanied by walker, wheelchair, or cane; the congregation is mixed in gender, age, and race.

The organist plays a voluntary by Thomas Tomkins (1572-1656), and more bells announce the beginning of the liturgy. All rise as the celebrant intones “Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” from the rear of the church. All then sing the hymn “Christ, when for us you were baptized” as the procession enters: thurifer, crucifer and torches, preacher, master of ceremonies, sub-deacon, deacon, and celebrant priest. This is followed by a plainsong Introit, sung from the rear gallery by the choir as the celebrant incenses the altar. Sung in Latin, the introit text is translated into English in the leaflet. (Beginning in 1991, the parish's current director of music undertook the task of adapting musical settings to modern English usage by arranging the minor propers from the melodies in the *Liber Usualis*.) The people then sing the *Gloria in excelsis* from Franz Schubert's *Deutsche Messe*, in English.

This is followed by the Liturgy of the Word, which begins with a lay woman reading Isaiah 42:1-9. Psalm 29 is sung in a four-part Anglican Chant setting by James Turle. While the singing is led by the choir and bolstered by the organ, the congregation participates with enthusiasm. Acts 10:34-43 is read by the vested sub-deacon, and all stand for an Alleluia verse (Mode II, led by a cantor, with the refrain also sung by the congregation).

During the Alleluia, a procession proceeds into the midst of the people for the proclamation of the Gospel. The deacon sings the acclamation, censes the gospel book, and sings Matthew 3:13-17. As the procession retires, the sub-deacon takes the open gospel book to the celebrant, who kisses the page. The preacher moves to the pulpit for the sermon, genuflecting before the tabernacle as he passes across the sanctuary.

The preacher, a brown-robed Franciscan, dons a stole and begins his sermon with a narration of liturgical history about celebrations of the feasts of the Incarnation, including the baptism of Christ. He asks the congregation how they as individuals are going to live into the three pillars of Christian vocation: prayer, evangelization, and mission. He suggests that the voice from God we hear today proclaims, "You are my child, my beloved," and then asks if we can do anything other than respond in love.

Following the sermon, all stand as the choir leads the first half of Litany of the Saints. During the Litany, the celebrant exchanges chasuble for cope, and he and various members of the altar party move to the font, which is at the rear of the church. The celebrant proclaims the blessing of the font, using the form for the Thanksgiving over the Water from the rite of Baptism. The people then renew their Baptismal Covenant. The cantor begins a plainsong setting of "Purge me, O Lord, from my sin," and the congregation joins in as the celebrant sprinkles the people with holy water. The Litany of the Saints is concluded, and all take their seats for the rector's announcements.

The Rector, an Englishman by birth, welcomes all to this festive conclusion of the parish's celebration of the incarnation season. The celebration has included not only Christmas and the Sundays after it, but also an evening solemn Mass for the Feast of the Epiphany, on January 6.

All stand, and the celebrant sings the bidding for the Peace, which the people exchange with both warmth and efficiency. All are seated as the choir sings *The Baptism of Christ*, by Peter Hallock. The anthem has a macaronic text of English and Latin, and is exquisitely presented by the five-voice choir. During the anthem, monetary offerings are collected.

All stand to sing the hymn "Songs of thankfulness and praise" as the offerings are presented and the altar, sacred ministers, and people are honored with incense. The choir sings the plainsong Offertory Antiphon, and the celebrant continues with the Anglo-Catholic "Orate fratres" prayer, translated into contemporary English and suitably gender balanced.

Eucharistic Prayer B is proclaimed, continuing with the Schubert setting of the *Sanctus*. In contemporary language, the Lord's Prayer is sung, followed by two fraction anthems and "Behold the Lamb of God" before communion. During the distribution of communion, the choir sings *Tribus miraculis* by Luca Marenzio (c.1553-1599) and a plainsong antiphon. The people then sing the hymn "When Christ's appearing was made known" while kneeling.

After the post-communion prayer, the celebrant pronounces the blessing, and the deacon sings the dismissal. The people sing "'I come,' the great Redeemer cries" as the procession exits. The organists play *Herzlich tut mich erfreuen* by Johannes Brahms as a postlude. After a hearty

greeting with the preacher and celebrant, most of the congregation moves to the parish hall, where an ample buffet awaits.

Advent's web site (advent-sf.org) describes the parish as "a Church which provides a full sacramental life of grace, with a compassionate, tolerant, and reasonable approach to the issues of life, without prejudice and without rigidity."

Headed away from the church after Mass, this visitor observed an apparently homeless woman who had just worshiped at Advent. She is harvesting weeds in a nearby empty lot, stuffing these into a plastic bag. Like this visitor, she, too, has returned to her normal existence, resuming mundane activities while bolstered in faith by the glimpse of divine glory offered at the Church of the Advent of Christ the King.

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