



## Message for First Sunday of Advent 2020

### “Next to Haps”

Greetings Saints and Happy New Year.... What “Father Joe has just lost his mind!” It is Thanksgiving Weekend and he is wishing us a Happy New Year. Well Saints, I have not entirely “lost it” as today is the beginning of a brand new “*liturgical*” year in the Episcopal Church. With each Advent comes a brand-new beginning with new lessons, new stories and we begin again another trip around the Circle of our Liturgical Year, with the 4 Weeks of Advent always signaling a “new beginning.” And so, on this first Sunday of Advent, Saints it is always good to bring to mind some wonderful, strong and meaningful symbols of Advent.

**Advent is a season of waiting.** We wait alongside Blessed Mary as her birthing journey of the Christ Child plays out around us week to week. Advent is a season of making ready, of preparations. A season of anticipation. It is also a season that begins in darkness and ends in new light. Advent is a season that is interesting in its symbolic placement, in the deepest, darkest, coldest, longest of times. Now we are experiencing the shortest of days and the longest of nights...that indeed makes this waiting time most challenging. But what is most interesting symbolically is that while we are now in deep darkness, an amazing and magnificent change is coming! The light is indeed, “at the end of this tunnel.” And the light comes with the Winter Solstice, which occurs here in the North Country on Saturday, December 21, 2020 at 2:02 AM

(PST). The Winter Solstice is that astronomical moment when the Sun reaches the Tropic of Capricorn and we have our shortest day and longest night of the year and marks the official start of the Winter Season. The term “solstice” comes from the Latin words “*sol*” (*Sun*) and “*sistere*” *to stand still*. Then after the Winter Solstice the angle of the sun begins to increase again, with longer days and shorter nights. This marks what many cultures believe to be a “rebirth of the Sun” as the hours of daylight become longer. Interesting yes? For the Christian community this birth of the Christ Child could not come at a more meaningful or significant time. New light, new birth, the Messiah’s birth symbolized by the Sun itself. Starting to make sense?

Yet another strong Advent symbol for us today is the transition from “humility to majesty” that indeed Jesus himself took and we take ourselves each Advent season. Our Advent symbol this year you see here in the Niche. It is the manger. It is the humblest of all the tools for “feeding”. The manger and its cousin the trough...of all there was to be fed, these are by far the most basic, crudest, and most humble of ways to receive nourishment. It is not grand, lavish, elegant or sophisticated. It is simple, effective, communal. And in that way, the lowly manger represents the message and ministry of Jesus himself. It is a preview of what is to come...simple, effective, communal...yet unforgettable.

In my adopted hometown of Helena, Montana there is indeed a “place to be fed” that meets all the “manger criteria,” simple, effective, communal and yes unforgettable. In Helena, there is a bar, that everyone in town or who has visited town knows about. Right there across the street from the Helena train station, right

there in the heart of the 6<sup>th</sup> Ward, on the edge of Moccasin Flats is Haps Bar. Famous for being infamous. And right there next to Haps is...you guessed it, “Next to Haps Café.” It was always easy to get directions to the place or to give them. Where is the best place to eat in Helena?” “Next to Haps!”

Next to Haps is a member of that great breed of family run, hometown cafés and diners that have dotted the western landscape for generations. A warm and sincere greeting from the owner who knows you and your family well. If you are a first timer there...you get introduced around to the “regulars,” share a hot cup of coffee and get to know each other and the place better. The menu is full of simple, hearty favorites...biscuits and gravy, hash browns, and awesome soup and stew and hearty chili, to help repair the meanest of hangovers developed next door and the deepest hunger of the Montana winter.

The mission is always the same, lets get some food in you. They always say that at “Next to Haps” ... *“get it in ya!”* Something to nourish body, soul and spirit. Nothing fancy or elaborate, just good, solid, filling, comfort food to sustain, nourish and heal. Next to Haps is that simple, humble, effective, communal...yet unforgettable way to be fed. Just like the manger. And the friend we make in both places, can last a lifetime.

And so, this Advent Season, Saints, we come in from the dark...looking for some new light, we come in hungry needing to be fed. And what do we find? A table set for a king?

Absolutely...6 wooden slats and some boards with straw. Not what you were expecting? Don't sell “Next to Haps” or the

manger short. There are lots of wonderful and tasty surprises to come.

Let our Advent Journey Begin....

