
**Reflections from the President
Festival of Lessons and Carols
and Stewardship Dinner
December 4, 2011**



David L. Parkyn, President

Advent is a special season, a quiet time of hope, a time to bring the light of Christ into the world.

In Advent we yearn for God to do something – to tear open the heavens and come down – to prove once and for all his omnipotence, to show for all to see his power beyond all power.

God does open the heavens, God does come down. But there is no tearing open of the heavens, no grandiose or gratuitous demonstration of omnipotence.

Here is how God works, how God breaks into our waiting, how God fulfills our hope. God breaks into our silence not coercively, but gently, through that very mystery which is the birth of children.

In this year's Advent season I'm particularly attentive to what biblical scholars call the infancy narratives – those parts of the early Gospel accounts in which infants, children, are especially featured.

I'm drawn to the infancy narratives for two reasons. First, I'm an educator, which means I live my life among the young – young adults, perhaps, but young to be sure. And second, I'm the grandfather of two young children, which means there's a special pleasure I enjoy every time one of these two calls out my name – "mor-far" for many of you, "buelo" for me.

You may have heard already that this year at North Park we have more undergraduates than ever before in the history of the school. More children than we thought possible. This brings much joy to this educator.

You may not yet have heard that on the last day before the season of Lent begins our daughter will give birth to our third grandchild. And you may not yet have heard that in the first week of Easter our daughter-in-law will give birth to a daughter, and to a son! Twins for the buelos. More grandchildren than we thought possible.

Now you know what draws me this Advent season to the children in the infancy narratives.

- To a young boy who will grow up in the desert and will teach strange things.
- To a second young boy who as a young man will wander an uncertain path to his death on a cross.
- And to another young boy, then another, still another, and many more, each killed before the age of two as a result of Herod's furious rage.

Each of these young lives in its particular way points to Emanuel, God among us.

In one of these narratives there is a priest name Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. Both were righteous in the eyes of God, living purely, blamelessly according to all God had commanded. Yet, they had no children, and both were getting on in years.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Elizabeth became pregnant. Stunned at this miracle she was afraid to show herself in public. Skeptical of this gift from God which his wife bore, Zechariah was struck mute, silenced in his skepticism. Their son John was born an infant with a mission – “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

This mandate on John's life is one I pray for my grandchildren – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

And this mandate on John's life is one which sounds suspiciously close to the mission of our school – to prepare people, students, for the day of the Lord, for lives of significance and service.

This infant John, we are told, grew and became strong in spirit. John grew up, graduated from college, and took a job in the desert. He was not socially sensitive for he called those around him a “brood of vipers.” Yet John commissioned these same people, these vipers, to make ready the way of the Lord.

“What then shall we do,” the people asked, “to make ready the way of the Lord?” His answer stunned these people even as it surprises us to this day. Repent? No. Live peaceably? No. Fast? No. Live a holy life? No.

The people asked, “What shall we do to make ready the way of the Lord?” And John answered, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” How do we make ready the way of the Lord? By being generous through sharing all we have.

When we gather on the campus of this wonderful University, when we cheer it on, when we assure its continued health and vigor, we are preparing the way of the Lord.

- Without your support and the generosity of many before you North Park would long ago have closed its doors.

- Without the gift of your second coat, without setting that extra place at your table, without your generosity, students today would not walk these sidewalks, or study in Brandel, or power up their computers, or exercise in Helwig, or lift their voices in song.
- Without your generous gifts through Campaign North Park future generations of students would not have a place to learn or scholarships to help pay their way.

For this, for your generous spirit, for preparing the way of the Lord at North Park, I am immensely grateful tonight.

In return, in this Advent season I hope you discover a special blessing, a gift meant just for you.

- In the midst of too much to do, too many parties to attend, too many cookies to bake, may you find a moment to be silent.
- As a supporter of education, may you have a chance to learn something new for yourself.
- As a grandparent, may you discover as I will the joy of another, then another, and yet another infant to hold and cuddle.
- In darkness may you find light; in sadness may you know joy; in loneliness may you discover companionship; in sickness may you be blessed with health.

Thank you for being present with us tonight. Thank you for supporting our students. Thank you for preparing the way of the Lord at North Park University.

God bless you tonight, and each night of this holy Advent season.

Thank you.