

Matthew 26:1-30

The Taste of Christmas

Jesus present with us

A Christmas Dinner

A Christmas dinner that can't be beat
Here is the menu of what we'll eat

Mashed potatoes whipped smooth and fluffy
Green bean casserole; nice and crunchy

Pickles and olives on a perfect relish tray
Cranberry delight that's been chilling all day

Sweet potatoes such tasty treats
Hot rolls steaming both white and wheat

Homemade honey butter and strawberry jam
A gorgeous honey glazed Christmas ham

Turkey and noodles are piping hot
A fuzzy naval salad; I almost forgot

A slow roasted turkey golden brown
And broccoli rice casserole; pass it around

For dessert we've a variety of tasty treats
Tons of scrumptious goodies to eat

Chocolate chip cookies and brownies so sweet
Four kinds of pies including minced meat

It's all there so fill up your plate
I'm getting mine, I can hardly wait¹

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https://www.poetrysoup.com/poems/about/christmas_food_poems. Accessed December 2, 2017.

This poem, written by Lena Townsend, may not describe your Christmas dinner, but it likely brought to mind Christmas dinner past, with exactly your favorite foods. There may also be a memory, such as my own, of an uncooked turkey when the stove gave out, or a failed dessert, but for the most part and for many of us, Christmas dinner brings back fond memories of family gatherings. I also acknowledge that for some this memory exists only in their hopes as Christmas might also have brought upon the family untold hardships.

Still, for the most part food itself conjures up the feeling of being fed, of nourishment for the body and hopefully the soul as well. In a time past, meals were something people stopped for. It was important to both physical needs and emotional needs. Now we tend to be on the go. Family meals get harder to accomplish, if they happen at all.

As we enter into Advent, which is celebrated in the church with the four Sundays preceding Christmas Day, it may be helpful to reflect on what is the point of Advent. In our homes and workplaces, in the stores and on the streets, it is evident that we are headed toward Christmas. The stores are busier, canned Christmas music is coming through the speakers, decorations are going up, and it becomes a time when charities really work at receiving donations. People just tend to be more charitable at this time of year. Children are sending their Christmas wish list to Santa Claus and waiting in expectation and hope.

We think of gifts, decorating, and of course the Christmas meal, and it is all good! It is a special time of year. But for those who believe in Christ, this time of year also has deeper meaning, or at least it should have deeper meaning. Just as the days of preparation to our celebrations are about waiting, Advent is also a time of preparation and waiting.

One thing we often miss though is that for Christians the waiting is two-fold. We wait for the Christ child, the one whose story tells us of Jesus coming to earth, being born in a very earthy place, where food would not have been plentiful, the accommodations meager, smells would have been less than inviting, and uncertainty was the norm.

In fact, a couple of years into the story, this couple to whom Jesus was born, would find themselves to be refugees as they fled the wrath of Herod. With all our Christmas music and decorations, we tend to forget that the snow was not lightly falling and Jesus was not being rocked to sleep with Away in a Manager. He would have cried, and kept Mary awake at night as she nursed him. The story of Jesus birth and life might well be closer to the story of many people in our community and certainly around the world than what the commercialism of Christmas makes it out to be. Still, it was so important for God to find a way to be close to people, to be able to show God's great love for us that through Christ, God became one of us.

But it is also a time that we recognize as incomplete. Jesus was born, lived his life, died, but it did not end there, if it had we would not have a reason to be the church over two thousand years later. The story continued with Jesus not just living out his life but

actually defeating death, then ascending to heaven to be seated with God. When all of this took place, a gift was sent to us in the form of the Holy Spirit who comes with the power and authority of God, as the Spirit is also God.

We remember this story each time we partake of the bread and wine or juice. This meal has a few names...Communion, Eucharist, the Lord's Supper...all are used to indicate that we are partaking in a meal, one to be shared. It is a symbolic meal, but it comes with power and witness, which it takes from history, it was instituted by Jesus just before he would be betrayed, arrested, beaten, and then hung on a cross to die. The worst death for the worst kind of people in the eyes of power, the government.

But Jesus knew, as he shared the meal with his disciples, as he broke the bread and blessed the wine, that these ordinary elements of bread and wine would become and outward sign of the testimony of God's grace. It would be like the seal on the promises of God, the promise that God is with us, we are forgiven, we are loved. The meal would help us remember the promise. It is also a meal that nourishes, but rather than just nourish the body it nourishes the soul. The bread to remind us of the life of Jesus from beginning to end. The juice or wine to remind us of the blood of Christ, and the sacrifice of Christ.

This meal lovingly set, witnesses to God's grace and assurance of God's blessing which is alive and active. The bread and the wine or juice have no inherent value in and of themselves, but through the power of the Holy Spirit we and the elements are lifted up to Christ. The meal is shared first to strengthen faith, then as a way to proclaim and give thanks for what we have received through Christ until he comes again, the second Advent.

Finally, this meal is a sign of unity. Through the Lord's Supper we become the visible church in the world. In our time, it also shows how broken the church still is as we are not necessarily welcome to partake in the Lord's Supper in every place of Christian worship. No church has got this worship and witness thing down, we all do it in imperfect ways, which points to the waiting that we continue to do in this Advent. We wait and proclaim as best we can until Christ comes again.

It is through the Easter story that we taste Christmas. Through the bread and the juice we recall why a babe in a manger is celebrated and why we are not done yet. Come today...you who believe in Christ, who call him Saviour, who trust or hope in the forgiveness of sins, who know Christ, but want to know him more...come and eat. Prepare for the Advent of the Babe and the Christ. Taste and see that the Lord is God. Amen.