
The Dramatis Personae of Advent

A sermon by Dean Sam Candler
Advent 2 – Year C

We have just heard the list of characters. “In the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod ruler of Galilee, his brother Philip in Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, the Word of God came to John, son of Zechariah.”

They joined the cast of characters, the *dramatis personae* you might say, in this beautiful drama that prepares for the birth of Christ. And so, during these four Sundays of Advent before Christmas, the cast of characters, the *dramatis personae*, the roles in the play, get larger and larger. We will hear of the Emperor Augustus. We will hear of Quirinius, governor of Syria. John will be born of Elizabeth, cousin of Mary, who has a husband Joseph, confounded and faithful in the whole operation. And they will be joined by wise men from the east, shepherds out in the field, cattle and sheep, until finally, there is one dramatic procession coming down the aisle of the Cathedral at the Christmas Pageant, 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve.

This list of characters, this cast of dramatic people, all play a part in the birth of Christ. And the list reminds us that each of us plays a part in our own time, in our own style, in our own vocation. Each of us has a role to play in this drama, where God becomes flesh.

Who will you be in this drama? What part will you play in preparing the way for the birth of Christ? Because all of us have a role. All of us are in the cast. We're all part of the cast of characters.

Maybe in these days before Christmas, we are the caregivers. Maybe we are the buyer of gifts. Maybe we're the person making money so that somebody can buy the gifts. Maybe we are at the homeless shelter or serving food to the hungry. Maybe we are the son. Maybe we are the daughter, preparing the way. Maybe we are preparing the way, even as we go through these endless errands before Christmas, driving this way and that, and tending to up and down.

Maybe we are Bob Cratchit in the drama. Maybe we are Jacob Marley. Maybe we are Tiny Tim. Maybe we are even Ebenezer Scrooge! Whoever you are, whoever each of us is, we have a part in this play. And whoever you are, you have a part to play in this Cathedral community, this place which rehearses and practices for the birth of Christ in the world. Whoever you are, you have a part to play here.

It may be that our parts are sad and painful. It may be that our roles are joyful and laughing. But in each of those roles, we are preparing for the Christ to be born. We are preparing for God to take on flesh.

An amazing thing happens when we prepare faithfully, when we get our role and we practice day in and day out, week in and week out. It turns out that the more we practice, the more we rehearse, the more holiness comes into the world right then and there.

The cast of characters doesn't simply end with the birth of Christ 2000 years ago. And the cast of characters doesn't end with the words of John the Baptist out in the wilderness. And the cast of characters doesn't end with Pontius Pilate. The drama continues and faithful communities, with saints going up and down on the ladders of God, as we just heard in the annual parish meeting. Saints are bringing holiness to the world day in and day out week in and week out.

The Cathedral of St. Philip just observed its annual parish meeting; and in that meeting, I noted how we are a sacred destination, a holy place, a place where people go to find grace and holiness, but also a place that sends out missionaries. It sends out grace and holiness as well. In this sacred place, each of us has a role. Each of us plays a part.

Like John the Baptist, we are preparing the way. Preparing the way. Preparing the way. Over and over again, for the Christ to be born. The prophecy that John speaks from, words from the book of the prophet Isaiah, who also prepared the way, the prophecy said, "Prepare the way. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God, so that all flesh can see the salvation of God."

The way that all flesh will see the salvation of God is if we play our role, if we live into this drama, and if we accept the birth of Christ in our hearts, in our lives, and pass on that sacred incarnation to those we come in contact with, that our families and our businesses, even driving on the streets of Atlanta.

None of us is going to be the superstar in the drama. There's only one Jesus Christ Superstar. None of us will probably be at the head of the parade—unless we're Atlanta United!—but each of us has a part to play, and if we play that part faithfully, we rehearse that part with goodness and with love, then as loving as we are, we're preparing the way for a love even greater than us. A love which all flesh can truly see: the birth of God, the birth of Christ in the world. On Christmas? Yes. But also every day and every week and every year in this holy drama, God becoming flesh so that all flesh can see the salvation of God.

Amen.