November 24, 2016  ***Happy New Year!*** Milepost 208

*Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.* Romans 12:2 (J.B. Phillips)

A new Church Year begins with four Sundays of preparation for Jesus’ birth. In Advent, we prepare for the Messiah’s coming as Mary, Elizabeth, Zachariah, Anna, Simeon, and John the Baptist did in Scripture. They were searching for *The Holy Way, and walked in the way of God’s heart*.

Following the Church Year regularly reminds us that our primary allegiance is to Christ, not culture.

If it’s December, North Americans are waiting for Christmas: for a package, party, paycheck, or present; for loved ones to call or family to gather; on a phone line, in line, or online. There is nothing passive about December waiting.

Our culture says the season is about lights and glitter, a journey of consumption from mall to mall. Scripture and Church History claim Advent is about being enlightened and guided into God’s Holy Way. Both involve active waiting. For which am I actively waiting?

Sue Monk Kidd relates a conversation with a monk in When the Heart Waits: *“I saw you today sitting beneath the tree…. I can’t seem to get used to the idea of doing nothing.” He broke into a wonderful grin. “Well, there’s the problem right there, young lady. You’ve bought into the cultural myth that when you’re waiting you’re doing nothing.... When you’re waiting, you’re not doing nothing. You’re doing the most important something there is. You’re allowing your soul to grow up. If you can’t be still and wait, you can’t become what God created you to be.”*

Kidd asks: *“What has happened to our ability to dwell in un-knowing, to live inside a question and coexist with the tensions of uncertainty? Where is our willingness to incubate pain and let it birth something new?”*

Waiting is hard work! Ask Noah, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Daniel, Mary, Simeon, Anna…or any child. Jesus’ parable of the loving Parent portrays God as One who waits for both wayward and self-righteous sons and daughters to come home. When we are still, we will know God in a way

we cannot experience at any other time. (Ps. 46:10). Waiting which leads to knowing God, takes great discipline.

A suggestion to prepare for Advent at Shalom: one night each week, turn off the lights and electronic gadgets…and light a candle. In the silence of a cold and dark night, reflect as you read the Advent texts.(See www.goshen.edu/devotions, for daily devotions on Advent lectionary texts.)

When we take time to find the silent places in which to watch and wait and prepare, we will discover anew the mystery of God’s dwelling among us. -Gary Martin