

As we begin our season of advent, of waiting and anticipation, the symbols of church ritual encourage us to enter a time of darkness or at the very least subdued light. We try to capture this mood by changing the altar cloths to dark purple and by wearing vestments of black as well as adding candles of purple, lit oh so slowly to gradually usher light back into our world.

I want to reflect on the banner hanging on your left, the dark banner, which Ruth Anna created and titled "dark matter". When I first saw it in her home, I felt it might help us connect our visual sense to our theological reflection of this Advent season. I encourage you to look closer at this banner during our season of Advent. The background is black velvet and glimpses of light appear scattered across the fabric; they appear to be distant galaxies and there are very small stars stitched across the cloth. Yet, the overall impression is "dark matter". Ruth Anna describes the art as what she envisioned the universe might have been like before creation.

We read in Genesis about a world of darkness, without form, and at the mercy of the waters of chaos. And then the "divine mystery" created light. If one reads the rest of the Bible, it becomes quite clear that this light did not bring chaos completely under control; yet, it did form, mold, shape, lure, cajole, the world into a place of possibilities so that light might be seen more brightly and divine order find its way into even the highest mountains of Peru.

For four weeks every year, we allow ourselves to acknowledge the obvious: our world is still one with chaos, suffering, and darkness. All the Christmas lights hung even before Thanksgiving cannot suppress what we really know: much of our world lives on the edge of chaos and even within our lives, our families, and our hearts the struggle is there, sometimes to a lesser degree and sometimes it hits us in the face. The glitter and lights we see outside are only protests, an attempt to obscure what deep down we know is true.

Yet, advent is not only darkness; it is also the womb of new beginnings, new possibilities, and new life. In Elizabeth's barren womb, new life will be born, and Zechariah is speechless and left to ponder what is in the future.

And so we move through these weeks with hope, anticipating peace, joy, love and believing that eventually the light of Christ message will come and burn brighter than any chaos around us. And while we wait, we light our candles, we send our mission angels flying, we buy our ornaments made with the devotion of people in far away places who know much more than we what life on the edge is like. We do these things so that gradually the light fills more of the space within our hearts, our lives, and our world in ways we've never known before now.

Perhaps your life is already pretty merry and bright; but perhaps, just perhaps there is a place in your soul that longs for new possibilities, a miracle of sorts, a new beginning. This season is for you. We are here today to say that light is on its way; it's not here yet; it's still in the womb of Mary and in the places where today dark matter still resides; but light *is* coming. Our role is to be truthful in saying that the world needs that light, and to keep watch for the glimpses of it as it appears so that we may play our role in nurturing the embryo of the light of the Christ child to be born anew in our time and in our world today. AMEN