

Devotion – Week of January 9, 2022

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

Well, all the Christmas excitement and hullabaloo is officially over. The Wise Men have come, given their gifts to the baby, and many of us have eaten King cake, hoping to get the little plastic baby in our piece.

We are now 7 and ½ weeks away from Ash Wednesday. Jim asked me recently why we go from Jesus' birth almost immediately to Jesus' death and resurrection. Why don't we start with the birth and spend a year with Jesus growing up, starting his ministry, and ending the year before Advent with his death and resurrection? It's complicated, because it's based on ancient church calendars and beliefs. So here's the strange reason Jesus' birth is celebrated in December. It has to do with the Annunciation – when Gabriel visited Mary and told her she was going to have a child. The early church chose March 25 as the day for the Feast of the Annunciation because they believed that people died on the same day they were conceived, and they believed that was the day Jesus died, based upon calculations of when the last day of Passover might have been about 33 A.D.

Then the early church fathers counted 9 months from March 25, and voila!! December 25, which just happened to coincide with the Roman festival of Saturnalia and the winter solstice in the old Roman calendar. So Jesus' birth date was set on that date. Now we don't really know exactly when Jesus was born or died, but the tradition has been set for those two days.

So that's why we move from December 25 to March 2, Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent – a period of six weeks prior to Easter. And Jesus' journey from birth to death gets compressed into this 8-9 week period. I will begin Jesus' journey this coming Sunday with a fairly humorous story about Jesus as a teenager. And we will travel to Jerusalem quickly over the next 8 weeks. And then we will spend the time from Pentecost in June to Advent in 2022 looking at Jesus' parables and teachings. We will slow down and look at what he said and what it means and quit hurrying from the manger to the cross. I hope that we will find insights from Luke about our Savior together this year.

Jeanne