



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Second Sunday in Advent, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

Our church's nickname for the Second Sunday in Advent – the day of the Church year we're marking today – is Bible Sunday. The name is derived from the Collect: "Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scripture to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ." *AMEN.*

A better nickname, however, would be "Obedience Sunday" because that really is the theme of the prayers and scripture lessons appointed for the day. It is a subject St. Paul discusses in the Communion Epistle. In the Gospel reading, Jesus warns us about the terrible consequences that can result from failing to take note of heaven sent warnings of impending disaster. And the New Testament lesson appointed for Mattins relates the most perfect act of obedience in human history.

If Holy Scripture teaches us one thing is that obedience does not come naturally to human kind. Not only are we routinely disobedient to the human beings set over us – our

parents, our teachers, our bosses at work – we are also equally disobedient to God our Creator. May be this shouldn't be so surprising. After all the first notable human act to follow our creation was an act of spectacular disobedience to God – an act the consequences of which reverberate around the world today.

In some respects, the Bible might be seen as a monotonous catalogue of mankind's disobedience to our maker. Indeed, you can scarcely turn a page with reading some monumental of disobedience – most of them occasioned by our apparent inability to trust God to do what he says he's going to do. This is an odd sort of notion when one considers he has a 100 percent track record when it comes to keeping his word.

Yet Abraham and Sarah didn't believe him when he promised them a son in their old age and went ahead with their own arrangements with horrific consequences for the descendants in Israel. Moses did trust God when he asked him to lead the children of Israel out of captivity in Egypt. Instead, he tried to palm the job off on his brother Aaron.

The children of Israel tore up their covenant

with God after he led them through the Wilderness and miraculously enabled them to conquer the Promised Land. As a result, they came very close to losing the territory they has conquered back to its original owner. Then, forgetting God was their king, they demanded the Prophet Samuel give them a human one – condemning themselves to be ruled by a long line of human kings – most of them either hopelessly inept or downright evil.

Things weren't any better a thousand years later. The high priest Zacharias, for example, was outraged at the revelation that he would become John the Baptist's father – even when he heard the news directly from the lips of the Archangel Gabriel. "How can this be?" he fumed, "For I am an old man and my wife is well stricken in years."

Truth to tell, we haven't improved much over the millennia. It's not simply a matter of routinely ignoring the Ten Commandments. Sure, it is currently the fashion to chisel them off the walls of our schools and courthouses. But there has never been a time when they have been scrupulously observed.

We don't actually carve idols anymore – at least most of us don't – but we constantly erect them in our hearts. For some folks, it's money; for others it's the opposite sex; for yet others it's careers, cars or sports. Anything is an idol that distracts us from God.

And how many of us listen – let alone answer – the God speaks to us? When I was a kid I used to wonder if God had spoken to anyone besides Abraham? The answer is that God speaks to everyone. But Abraham was the only one who obeyed God's call. Things are just the same today, of course. He doesn't call us into his study for a talk,

or bawl us out like an Army drill instructor. He's simply a still, small voice in our hearts – a voice that offers comfort in time of trouble; a voice that urges us to do good deeds we would much rather not do. Sometimes we blot out God's voice completely. Often we spend weeks, months, years, decades even, arm wrestling him; rehearsing ideas for not doing as he says. I know I have.

Contrast this with the response of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the Archangel Gabriel's announcement that she was to bear the Messiah – an event described in a reading appointed for this morning's Office. Mary was just a girl in her middle teens yet she understood something that none of the top Scriptural scholars of her age understood – a thing many of us still fail to understand today. Mary understood her place in God's great scheme of things.

Mary understood that when God asks you to do something, it is your obligation to do it without equivocation, confident in the knowledge that God knows best. Mary is unique because she is the only person in scripture who didn't argue with God. Her instant and unquestioning obedience makes her, after her Son, the greatest human being who has ever lived.

In other words, Bible study should not be a quest to confirm God's approval for our own ideas and attitudes, but rather an effort to understand what God wants of us as individuals. Like Mary when Gabriel told her she would be the mother of the Messiah, our response should be: "Behold the servant of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word."

***To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and forever. AMEN***