

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18; 1 Cor 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

First Sunday of Advent – Year B – December 3, 2017

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Read the December 6 story from Antonie Schneider's *Advent Storybook: 24 Stories to Share Before Christmas*.

We celebrate St. Nicholas Day on Trinity's in-gathering Sunday—this First Sunday of Advent. The St. Nicholas story has a poignant theme for stewardship. “We’ve given away everything,” said the little bear. Nicholas responded, “And because we did, we are nearer to Bethlehem.” Mother Bear then said to her little one, “Remember that sharing with others brings us closer to God.”

This storybook is “filled with acts of heroism and kindness and many small miracles that show the little bear a path to the Christ Child.” Advent is a time of waiting and hoping and watching and preparing and being awake. It’s a time to do what Jesus calls us to do and to pay attention to the surprising ways that Jesus is present for us now.

We have a story in today's Gospel—a lesson from the fig tree. Earlier in Mark there is a story (Mark 11:20-22) about a fig tree that had withered away to its roots—it was the ending of that fig tree. Today's story is about the beginning of a fig tree—“as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.” (Mark 13:28). As story often does, this one takes us to another time and place—to a grower of figs. Someone tends the branches and cares for the fruit such that it nourishes those who receive the fruit. This Advent season

comes in the flurry of shopping—Black Friday sales, Cyber Monday, small business days, Christmas carols in the stores, office parties, Christmas baking. These things of the world invite stress while at the same time, in the beginning of the Church year, we're invited to tend our branches—to do the things Jesus calls us to do and to pay attention to the surprising ways that Jesus is present for us now.

Life is fragile, and seasons are short. Remember the fig tree and how it needs tending. Remember that sharing with others brings us closer to God. Pay attention to the acts of heroism and kindness and small miracles that surround you and let them show you a path to the Christ Child.