



4729 Ellsworth Ave
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
412-621-4361
ascensionpittsburgh.org

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Special Statement about the Nation

January 6th, the feast of the Epiphany, is the day Christians celebrate Jesus the Light of the World being made manifest. Specifically, we remember the visit of the Magi – those Wise Men, Gentile God-fearers – bearing gifts and kneeling before Jesus, the Savior of the World.

January 6th will also now be remembered as a very dark day for our Nation. The day when an angry, armed mob invaded the Capitol which has now left five people dead. In what many describe as an insurrection against the Constitution, laws, and values of the United States we saw seditious, sinful, shameful behavior writ large across our screens, and on display to a watching world. Tragically this comes on the heels of the past year in which we have seen so much wicked behavior in our cities and on our streets – rioting, lawlessness, and shameful and violent racism.

The people of our Land voted in November. The vote, though vigorously contested and in many places close, was nevertheless clear and decisive. Notwithstanding repeated accusations of fraud, the courts (at every level) have repeatedly and resoundingly rejected nearly all of these claims, again and again citing a complete lack of credible evidence that would make any difference to the outcome of those elections.

In light of the events of this past week, our national leaders, elected and entrusted with upholding the rule of law, have important decisions to make. They will have to decide what, if anything, can or should be done about the words and actions of our President, before or after our President-elect, is sworn in on January 20th. Our job is to pray for them – **regardless of our personal political views**. As God says: “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Today, the pandemic rages. Hundreds of thousands are dead here in the United States. Today, the nation is deeply divided by ideology, conspiracy theories, nationalism, racism, and pride. We are surely living in great darkness. And yet, in this Epiphany season we are called to be light in the world.

How are we to do this? Briefly, I believe that we as Christians, and as members and friends of this church family, are called to do three things:

- 1) We are called to pray, even as we “mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15b).
- 2) We are called to live into the vision that has been set before us these past many years – that particular understanding of who God has called us to be: *A Worshipping Community, Equipping God’s People, Sharing Christ’s Healing with a Broken World*.
- 3) We are called to continue the task of *Welcoming our Neighbors and Reaching the Nations*.

These are not mere platitudes and slogans; they require action.

As St. Paul tells us, “Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against... the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). “We are to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power” (v.10). In these dark days we are called not to take up arms, not to flame on Facebook, not to accuse others, but to “put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (v.11).

The armor of God is “the belt of truth... the breastplate of righteousness... shoes [that] will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace... the shield of faith... the helmet of salvation. And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (vs. 14-17).

The call to be a *Worshipping Community*: In a season of forced separation because of the pandemic, our call to prayer and worship together is more critical than ever. Given our separation and isolation, more creativity and intentionality are needed as we connect with one another. I’ve appealed several times for each of us to reach out by phone, text, through emails and notes. Let us now take this a step further. Today, I’m asking that you speak with two or three other people this week and that you ask how you can pray for them. Perhaps you will share a need, a longing, a verse of Scripture, a request or thanksgiving and then take a moment to pray together over the phone.

The call to be *Equipping God’s People*: There are many opportunities for being strengthened and equipped in our faith available here at Ascension. You can access the details on our website. More than that, when we care for one another, listen to one another, and pray for one another, we equip one another to take our stand against the spiritual forces of evil.

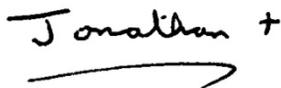
The call to be *Sharing Christ’s Healing with a Broken World*: What are we to share – our anger, our political opinions, our despair? No! We have something so much more powerful. We have Jesus. This present darkness, of pandemic, and national upheaval is but a blip on the timeline of eternity. Our Lord and King is Jesus. “[He] is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Our hope is Christ.

Finally, I want to take the words angels say, every single time they bring God’s message to his people: **“Do not be afraid.”**

Why? Because there is **nothing** that can separate us from the love of God.

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Yours in Christ,



Jonathan Millard
Rector