Embracing anticipation

By Chaplain Corey Thornton

The holiday season is once again upon us. This is a time bustling with social events and celebrations. This is also a time known to Christians as the season of Advent. Advent is when we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Many do this with fasting and prayer. Some read and meditate upon the sacred scriptures of the Bible.

Advent constitutes the four weeks before Christmas and is the first season of the church year. It is not only intended as a time of preparation for remembering the coming of Jesus Christ at Christmas, but also as a time of anticipation for his promised second coming at the end of history. Advent is a Latin word for "coming" and was translated into Latin from the Greek word parousia. Parousia is the word used throughout the New Testament to refer to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The Advent season is as old as Christianity itself. A form of Advent is believed to have been observed by the apostle Peter and the very first followers of Jesus Christ. However, the earliest Advent practices did not culminate with Christmas but with the Epiphany, which takes place on Jan. 6. Christians in the west celebrate the Epiphany as the adoration of Jesus by the Magi. Epiphany in the east celebrates Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. With the shaping of the Christian calendar in Constantine's Rome in the 4th Century, we see the formation of the Advent that is practiced in our present day, which culminates with the celebration of Christmas.

To a society that predominantly sees the weeks before Christmas as a time for shopping and parties, it might seem that Advent observances, such as prayer, devotional reading and meditation, are a bit out of sync with the times. The reality is that they probably are. They appear to be more inline with the ancient practices of the Christian faith. And while there are many reasons that could be proposed to commend these practices, I would like here to reflect on what I see as a primary one, and that is the benefit that comes from embracing anticipation.

Ours is a society that more often than not ops for the easiest or most expedient solution to life's problems. Where our needs and wants are concerned, we are the "microwave society." Out television shows and movies teach us that most problems can be solved and conflicts resolved in two hours or less. As children of the Enlightenment, we pride ourselves on self-improvement and self-empowerment. We tend to confront those aspects of life that are out of our control—and there are many—as areas for the science and technology of the future to conquer. Whether it's the realization of world peace (that has evaded us since the beginning of the human race) or the cure for the common cold, we see life's challenges as a threat to the advancement of our modern lives. To be sure, we've scored many successes along this course, but, an unfortunate byproduct has been that many of us have developed into people with less patience and tolerance than our predecessors. While we can benefit from faster and more productive lifestyles, we must recognize that these solutions do not address the developments of character, such as an awareness and acceptance of our human limitations. Advent runs intrinsically against the grain of this quick-fix philosophy. In Advent we acknowledge a need for a savior, to save us from the perils of this world and to save us from ourselves. This requires that we admit that we cannot solve all of our problems alone but must rely on God's help.

In Advent when we anticipate the first coming and final coming of our Savior, who is God's solution to the human condition. We acknowledge that, no matter how technologically advanced or scientifically enlightened we become, we cannot engineer and manufacture this help.

In Advent we embrace the anticipation of our journey toward a bright future with God.

Embracing this process of not instantly possessing our goal but looking and preparing for it, we develop our character and our spiritual selves. And in the anticipation of Advent we find truly meaningful fulfillment in the arrival and celebration of Christmas Day.

Japanese group honors lives lost in war on Guam

By MC2 Waris Banks, U.S. Naval Base Guam Public Affairs

SANTA RITA, Guam (NNS) -- Association (SPMA) and Japanese War Veterans Association, visited U.S. Naval Base Guam (NBG) Nov. 18 to pay homage to Japanese, American, and Chamorro service members and civilians killed during World War II.

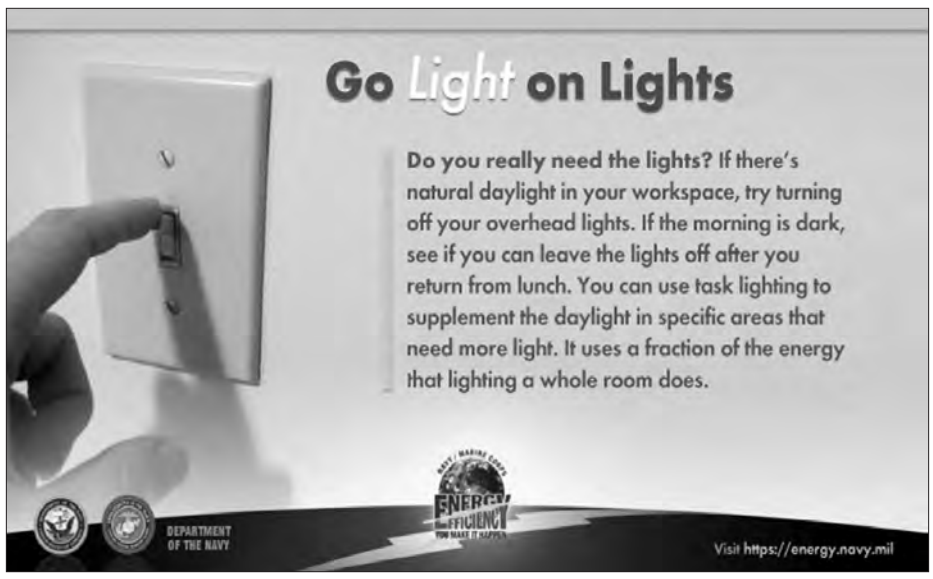
Led by Buddhist priest, Rev. Ryusei Tsutsui of the Kawasaki-Daishi Heiken-ji Temple in Kawasaki, Japan, the group held a prayer ceremony and laid a wreath at the Orote Peninsula battlefield, an area where some of the most intense battles for the liberation of Guam from Japanese occupation occurred July 21, 1944.

"In this area more than 3,000 Japanese soldiers died," said Seiichi Eto, newly elected president of SPMA, speaking through a translator.

NBG Commanding Officer Capt. Richard Wood said visits like these are an important part of the Navy's Cooperative Strategy as the force evolves into a 21st century sea power.

"Every year we have guests from Japan who come here who are either guests or, in some cases, descendants of veterans who fought on the island of Guam," said Wood. "Now, we're allies with the Japanese; we're friends with the Japanese, so we know how important it is to honor their war dead as well."

Wood added an important part of this strategy is based on principles of cooperation, partnership and trust between the United States and other nations.

The tour was organized through a collaborative effort between NBG and SPMA and included a visit to other historical sites on base related to WWII.

These sites included the amphitheater built by Japanese prisoners of war in 1946 and the Dadi Beach Japanese Defense Fortification manned during the Japanese defense of Guam during the American forces landing July 1944.