Merry Advent!

By Chaplain Corey Thornton

Just shortly after Halloween this year, I was shopping in the Navy Exchange when something caught my attention. Holiday and Christmas music was playing over the store's sound system. Had the holiday season begun already? I've grown accustomed to hearing this music the day after Thanksgiving. Now it seems that the holiday season begins with Halloween.

Each year the holidays seem to begin earlier in our western consumer marketplace and for what reason? Did we not get enough holiday cheer last year between Thanksgiving and the New Year? I highly suspect that sales numbers are a primary motivator for this change and not the public's need for a protracted holiday season.

As economics seem to be driving this season of our lives, they also seem to be altering our reasons for celebrating the season in the first place. Progressively, the celebration of Christmas as a holiday has been overcome by the less specific "Holiday Season." These days, store clerks and city banners more often proclaim "Happy Holidays" rather than "Merry Christmas." This is understandable, considering America's growing cultural and religious diversity.

While some Christians may find this development discouraging, I find "Happy Holidays" to be a more honest expression of what is being celebrated collectively. The celebration of Christmas is being cast aside by our society and replaced with the observance of a more general holiday season. My hope is that the Christian church would happily reclaim the Christmas season and celebrate it when and how their tradition dictates, unmotivated by the concerns of the marketplace.

Traditionally, Christians in the West waited until Dec.25 to begin their celebration of the Incarnation of Christ, when God became human and was born of the Virgin Mary. Christmas Day, the first of the "Twelve Days of Christmas" which followed, was not spent at parties or in front of a Christmas tree, but was spent at church. Preparations for this twelve-day celebration were not spent in shopping malls but in fasting and in prayer. This season of preparation is known as Advent.

In much of Western Christianity, Advent is still observed. It constitutes the four weeks before Christmas and is the first season of the church year. Advent is not only intended as a time of preparation for remembering the coming of the Lord at Christmas, but also as a time of anticipation for the second coming of Christ at the end of history.

Advent is a Latin word for "coming" and is a translation of the Greek word *parousia* which is used throughout the New Testament to refer to the second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of time. It is a time of watching and waiting, representing the anticipation of the Hebrew people for the Messiah to come and for Christians who anticipate the return of the 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 Christ. However, the earliest Advent practices did not culminate with Christmas but with the Epiphany, which takes place Jan. 6 and celebrates Jesus' adoration by the Magi (in the West) or his baptism in the Jordan River (in the East).

With the shaping of the Christian calendar in Constantine's Rome in the fourth century we can recognize the form of Advent that is practiced in our present day, although in our present times there is likely less fasting and prayer by most! To be sure, there are plenty of devout Christians that are sincere in their celebration of Christmas but no longer observe the season of Advent. For these Christians, the season of preparation before Christmas is more celebratory and culminates, rather than begins on Dec. 25. While this is a more recent practice, it is still a powerful expression of joy at the nativity of our Lord.

In the end, no matter how early the local shopping mall says the holiday season has begun, Dec. 25 will always be Christmas, and Advent – the season of expectation – will precede it. I am sure that there are plenty of good reasons to celebrate the holiday season, and for those of you who hold those reasons dear, Happy Holidays to you. For those of you who are preparing to celebrate Christmas, merry Advent!

International Christmas Celebration
at the Chapel of Hope
Dec. 12 at 5 p.m.

Come celebrate Christmas with us...

Reaching across culture and language through music and worship!

This international celebration is inclusive of all Christian faiths and will feature choirs from local Japanese and Korean churches.

Contact the Chapel of Hope at 243- 6773 for more information.

Nile C. Kinnick High School cheerleaders "Bring it on!"

(Back, left) KHS cheerleaders Joshua Hunt, Ajia Murphy, Megan Stith, Alexus Graddic, DiQuiana Jones (front, left) Courtney Bethel, Jelisa Hall, Amanda Sibayan, Selena Cruz and Khaimook Grosshuesch pose for a group photo. The cheerleaders traveled to Iwakuni, Japan, to participate in the Far East Cheerleading Clinic and Performance Nov. 8-12.

Story and photo by Vicki Boehler,
Nile C. Kinnick High School Public Affairs

Nile C. Kinnick High School (KHS) cheerleaders traveled to Iwakuni, Japan, to participate in the Far East Cheerleading Clinic and Performance Nov. 8-12.

While competing at MC Perry High School, they met the best of the best of Far East Varsity Cheerleading squads. The KHS cheerleaders' hard work and determination paid great dividends and brought home a number of awards.

The National Cheerleader Association (NCA) sponsored the weeklong clinic for the schools. The weeklong activity, first introduced to Department of Defense Education Activity schools in November 2000, caught on with such exuberance amongst the area's young cheerleaders that they asked NCA back to follow their more precise routines.

This past spring, the students knew hard work was ahead of them with tryouts in August to make their school's elite cheer squad. Once that was accomplished, more hard work was ahead of them to look good for their community on the football sidelines. The Red Devil Cheer Squad motivated the crowd well this year. It also helped them to prepare for the Far East clinic and performance event.

At the event, maneuvers, dance routines, stunts and tosses were demonstrated to the school's teams. The intense training resulted in performances given by each school at the end the week.

A ceremony concluded the week-long event, where students and teams were recognized for their accomplishments. The KHS Cheer Squad was recognized with the following awards:

• First Place in the Game Day Competition: Routine completed by the entire Varsity Cheer Squad.

• First Place in Coed Top Gun Stunt Competition: Routine completed by junior Josh Hunt, sophomore Khaimook Grosshuesch, with an assist from junior Ajia Murphy.

• All-American Awards: Joshua Hunt, Khaimook Grosshuesch and Ajia Murphy.

• Nationals Invitational bid: Due to superior performance throughout the week and throughout various competitions, the NCA staff granted the KHS Cheer Squad a Nationals Invitational bid.

The entire team was also awarded four Superior Ribbon Awards after their routines were evaluated by NCA staff. This is the highest recognition a team can receive. The NCA Spirit Stick was also awarded for the teams enthusiasm and intensity that they maintained throughout the week.

"Beginning the season with only five [members returning and] the rest of the team brand new to cheerleading, it was definitely obvious that the hard work and dedication of the entire team paid off," KHS co-cheerleading coach Kelly Czuba-Donat said. "Congratulations to [them] all!"

Seahawk Community Announcements and Article/Photo Submissions – Deadline for community announcements and article/photo submissions for the Seahawk is the Thursday before the next Seahawk edition. E-mail your submissions to Seahawk-Umitaka@fe.navy.mil. Include your telephone contact information in the body of the e-mail. E-mail to Seahawk-Umitaka@fe.navy.mil or call 243-2567/3003 for specific submission requirements or for more information.

Channel 15 Slide Scroller Submissions – All community announcement presentations for airing on local base channel 15 can be created using Microsoft PowerPoint software but must be saved and submitted as a jpg/jpeg type file. E-mail your submissions to watchpao395@gmailcom. Contact Tony Hill at ronald.hill@fe.navy.mil for more information.