



***“Together, the Body of Christ;  
Individually, Its Parts” I Corinthians 12:27***

JAUC is a Christian community seeking to reach out, especially to Japanese and those who are interested in Japan in the greater New York City area, with the purpose of sharing faith in Christ and growing together in Christian discipleship through worship, fellowship, study, evangelism and mission.

## ◆Pastor Takahashi's Message◆

***Message for Advent*** There are two The season of Advent marks a new beginning in the Christian church calendar, followed by Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time as odd as it sounds. There are some special days in between such as Transfiguration Sunday, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Trinity Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, and so on. The beauty of living according to the liturgical calendar is that we follow the footsteps of Jesus closely, step by step, Sunday after Sunday throughout the year. Advent is the season of waiting not only for the birth of Christ, but also for Christ's return. We are thinking of new beginnings, while expecting the end. Sometimes, our rituals and routines betray the original thoughts and intentions. In fact, Jesus came to straighten them up. For instance, Sabbath was created for our sustainability, but in Jesus's time, Sabbath was practiced for Sabbath per se. To the majority of people in this city, the nativity scene of crèche becomes a cliché: a seasonal reminder of holiday season. A nativity scene in a storefront represents an overused extraordinary event without ever thinking of the original meaning. ◆The original event of the birth of Christ was not a normal event in any sense, the location, the circumstances, and the encroaching dangers were just a few of the less than circumstantial event. The couple, Mary and Joseph, who were on the run, had to give the birth to their baby, and ended up with laying the new born in a manger. In our time, the holiday season gives many of us warm feelings of comfort: the Christmas tree in Rockefeller Center is lit up, family and friends gathering, gifts, and of course, a feast. The warm memories of Christmas can help us sustain ourselves when the cold season comes into our lives. Life is hard and we all struggle more or less. The cold season comes sometimes

even to those who have a good life. It is not a question of if, but when crisis comes to our lives. Life is unpredictable. Living with some kind of uncertainty is inevitable. For believers and the faithful, Advent is not just the beautiful prelude of Christmas; also waiting anxiously for the divine judgment. But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Matthew 24:36) ◆God planted the seed of JAUC here in NYC 123 years ago. The seed sprouted, grew up into a tree, went through many storms, and survived them all. We must remember the legacies of this faith community and the struggles and sacrifice that the people before us made in order to pass God's beloved church onto next generations. They knew that things on earth are mortal and vulnerable through their firsthand Japanese American experiences during World War II, including the destructions of their parents' hometowns, the Internment Camp and the 442nd Infantry Regiment. They knew that we should not take anything for granted. We should keep awake, otherwise a flood would come and sweep all away. People before us knew that we must keep awake, otherwise when two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. We are blessed to have the permanent worship space in a convenient location. But we must remember not to take it for granted. When a flood comes, we might be swept away. Or we might be taken away when a thief comes. Unexpected things may happen or will happen. However, we should not fear. Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10) Emmanuel means God is with us. ◆As December comes, my personal computer loaded with so many files that I have worked on throughout these years becomes overwhelmed and sluggish. When I multitask on my old trusty laptop, it begins to overheat and its cooling fan works so hard and loud. I become a little anxious that my laptop might be on fire and is about to break. In that case, I tentatively stop what I am doing, close multiple files that I am working on the screen, and reboot computer. It works always. The Random Access Memory gets a clean slate. Everything starts working. Just like personal computers, we also need to reboot our faith sometimes. When we are overwhelmed by the

amount of things we do: work, study, personal life, relationships, or whatever we do, we lose clarity and efficiency of what we do. Many things in our lives can be tangled, clogged, and stagnated. In that case, we need to clean up the clogs of life in order to wipe a slate clean, to make a fresh start. Advent is the perfect season to reboot, restart, or renew our faith commitment.

## ◇Church Activities & Schedules◇

■ **Scripture Verses** The Scripture verses for December Sunday services are: Dec. 4 -Matthew 3:1-12; Dec. 11 ó Matthew 11:2-11; Dec. 18 óMatthew 1:18-25; Dec. 25 ó Luke 2:1-14, Luke 2:8-20; John 1:1-14; Jan. 1 óLuke 2:15-21 (Subject to change). [www.lectionarypage.net](http://www.lectionarypage.net).

■ **New Music Director!!** JAUC welcomes Mr. Zura Kobakhidze as our new Music Director!! Mr. Kobakhidze is from Georgia (a former Soviet republic), brought up as an Eastern Orthodox Christian. He is a graduate of Boston Conservatory at Berklee and has a Master of Music degree from the Julliard School. He has a solid background in classical music and traditional hymns as well as the ability to play contemporary praise songs and skilled at improvising original compositions.

■ **Christmas Eve Schedule** This year, our Christmas Eve service will be held at JAUC at 4:30PM on Dec. 24.

■ **Preparation for the Year 2017 (from the Board of Directors)** It is budget season again! As a church leader, you should start meditating and planning for your committee's or group's activities for 2017. In order to support your activities for next year, we would like to have a budget request based upon your plans. May God give you vision and direction through this process.

◆ **Our Annual Congregational Meeting** will be held at JAUC on Jan. 29, 2017. If you are a chair of a committee or a small group, please submit your report to Ms. Tomoko Sugawara by Jan. 7 so that we can include it in the Annual Report booklet. Please also fill and submit your pledge cards, distributed during the worship service on Nov. 27. ◆ **The Nomination Committee**, who works to identify candidates for new Board members, consists of Ms. Tomoko Sugawara and Ms. Rika Marubashi Downs (Ms. Kaoru Suzuki will assist).

■ **Thanksgiving Dinner** Our Annual Thanksgiving Dinner was held on Thanksgiving Sunday, Nov. 20.

About 90 people attended. We praise God for this event and express our sincere gratitude for all those who helped cooking, serving, cleaning and other services.

■ **Small Group** Mr. Sora Enomoto, Ministerial Intern, started a new small group "Ministry of Discernment" in September. The purpose of this weekly meeting is to listen to "the light murmuring sound of the Lord" (1 Kings 19:12) through Bible reading, 30-minute silent meditation, and sharing. The study is held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of JAUC every Wednesday (Matthew) and Thursday (Genesis).

■ **P-Forum** P-Forum is a support group for parents with children, gathering at JAUC every 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of month. We intend to help rear the children "entrusted" to us by God "as a village," learning from the wisdom of the Scripture and the experiences of other parents and sharing each other's joy and worry.

■ **Language Courses** During the Sunday lunch hour, an English program for Japanese speakers, conducted by Ms. Antoinette Jones of John Jay College, is being held in the JAUC Social Hall. Ms. Antoinette Jones is also leading a Japanese language course during this time.

## ◇Stewardship Month Testimony◇

At JAUC, November is "Stewardship Month," the season to meditate on the gifts which we have received from God and to consider how we should use them to glorify our Lord. During this month, church members gave their testimonies during Sunday worship service (Nov. 6: Ms. Rika Marubashi Downs, 13<sup>th</sup>: Mr. Dean Kusakabe, 20<sup>th</sup>: Mr. Takumi Fukunaga, 27<sup>th</sup>: Guest speaker - Rev. Kei Okada). The following is the testimony of Mr. Fukunaga.

◆ **Mr. Fukunaga's Testimony:** I started coming to JAUC in 2006, when I had just moved to New York City to attend graduate school. Born and raised in a Christian household in Japan, going to church has always been a part of my life. But if you asked me back then why I went to church on Sunday, I probably would have said, "because I've always gone to church, and my parents wanted me to go to church." I didn't have a personal relationship with God and my Christian faith was simply a front, just a label on a box without much inside of it. ◆ Living in this big city and not having friends or family nearby, I was lonely and feeling uncertain about my future. I'm sure many of you who have moved here,

particularly if you did it on your own, can relate to this feeling. For me, God used this difficult time of my life to speak to me and develop that personal relationship that I never had. In Romans chapter 8, verse 28, Paul wrote, "And we know that in ALL THINGS God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." God showed me His eternal love through my family here at JAUC. I became a regular member of the choir. I came to JAUC every Thursday evening and Sunday morning, practicing and praising God with Mrs. Elizabeth Suzuki, the choir leader, and Harry Kuwada and other choir members. I felt connected and warmly supported. I really experienced the joy of revering and praising God with our voices. I was also well nourished with dinner served before Thursday evening practice - this was a big draw for me as a starving student at the time. ♦ One of my mentors once told me that the Christ's cross represents relationships in two dimensions - the vertical line representing our relationship with God, and the horizontal line representing our relationships with our brothers and sisters. Both are essential for the well-being of our Christian faith. By going through a difficult time, God taught me how to pray continuously and read the Bible so that I could seek His will through that vertical dimension. This was also the time when men's group started to meet. Men's group, led by Dean Kusakabe, meet regularly to study the Bible, share each other's concerns, and pray for each other. By participating in the men's group, I've found joy in studying the Bible, getting to know my brothers in Christ, going camping in the summer, preparing our famous pasta lunch on 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays, and praying for and supporting each other through the many joys and concerns we've had. This small group has solidified in me that horizontal relationship, which has been a vital part of my life as a Christian. ♦ Being a member of JAUC has also taught me the joy of working for the Lord and serving others. Although I was hesitant at first, serving monthly as a liturgist has been an important learning experience in so many ways, and helped me to connect with the JAUC family in a different way. Contributing to the maintenance of this building through cleaning, and discussing plans in the board of trustee meetings has also become an important part of my

life at JAUC. Lastly, giving back to God a portion of what I earn from work has strengthened my faith in God and has brought me joy that I am able to give back to God and to the community that has given me so much. ♦ I don't think my faith journey has taken a single, drastic turn. But, looking back on the last 10 years, I clearly see that God led me to JAUC to develop and nurture my faith, by the warm welcoming, the hymns we sing together, the Bible studies we have together, working together in the big spring cleaning, with the meals we share together, and encouraging and praying for each other. I am so thankful to God for this JAUC family, and I encourage each one of you, especially those of you who haven't been involved or if you started coming to JAUC recently, to get involved and experience for yourself what God has planned for you through this community.

## ◆ Church Members & Friends ◆

**Visit** On Nov. 20, our sister Ms. Mayumi Takahashi (née Hanabusa), who had moved to Tokyo in 2003, visited JAUC with her husband Rev. Izaya Takahashi. We are so happy for reunion!

## ◆ Local Church Network ◆

■ **Passing** Rev. Takashi Uehara, pastor of the Washington Japanese Christian Church, passed away on Nov. 20. He was 78. May the comfort of God be with his family and church members during this difficult time.

## ◆ Prayer Requests ◆

Please remember the following people in your prayers: Victims of the mass killing of the physically and mentally challenged people at Sagami-hara, Japan; victims of the senseless attacks in Nice, Orlando, Istanbul, and other places; those affected by the earthquakes in Kumamoto, Japan, Italy, and Ecuador; victims of terrorist attacks; Refugees in Syria, Iraq, and Libya; those suffering from the aftereffects of Hurricane Matthew, Hurricane Sandy, and the East Japan Earthquake; June Goldberg, Michiko Gorman, Takashi Charles Hanasaki (LJP Church), Teruo Inoue, Young Kim, George Mukai, Masaari Naito (Tuckahoe Church; suffered from a stroke); Ai Oguchi (Westminster Japanese Church, Atlanta), Nanako Oguri, Yuriko Tomita, John Yoshinaga.

**Newsletter Team:** Ken & Noriko Kurihara, Junko Noguchi, Momoko Enomoto