

“He Must Increase, But I Must Decrease”

John 3:22-36

During these weeks of Advent, we have been preparing. We have been preparing for next Wednesday and Thursday.

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are such festive events in the life of God’s people. Our children have been preparing to tell the story once again, as they do each year – they are preparing to tell the story of the birth of the Son of God. We are preparing for the Candle Light Service on Christmas Eve which is such a beautiful reminder of how the light of Christ has scattered the darkness of sin in our lives. And the Christ Mass on the 25th, gathering together around the body and blood of our Lord – this is what it is all about.

During these weeks of Advent, we have been preparing. We have decorated our church. We have decorated our homes. We have baked cookies (when I say “we” I am speaking in general terms here). We have purchased gifts for friends and loved ones

– and we even give gifts to people we don't know. And sometimes we give “white elephant gifts” to people we do know.

The old adage of unselfishness, “it is better to give than to receive” is a recurring theme in the Advent and Christmas story. The important thing to remember is that God operates this way also, and in a much more grand and complete way. God gave His promise of forgiveness and salvation to Adam and all the people of old. God gave His Son as the greatest of gifts. Christ lowered Himself and allowed Himself to be humiliated so that we, although totally undeserving, could be lifted up, raised up, and be called true children of God.

As we have been focusing our attention on John the Baptist, as we have been preparing during these weeks of Advent, we began with John being a gracious gift to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Our first week, John was silent in the womb. And the angel Gabriel, and eventually his father Zechariah, proclaimed great things were in store for John – he would come in the power and spirit of Elijah.

Last week, as John proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, no one could silence that “voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘prepare the way of the Lord.’”

This week, it would have been easy to focus on John’s death and how Herod, and, more specifically, Herod’s wife, silenced him by having his head cut off. But as we know, John has not been silenced. As I said last week, we still proclaim Christ with John’s words, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” We sing that repeatedly in the Gloria in Excelsis and the Agnus Dei.

John’s proclamation of Jesus as the Lamb of God has never been silenced. However, John did see the need for his ministry to come to a close. John says of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

John’s disciples were concerned that Jesus and His disciples were more popular – as if they were in competition with one another. But John has everything in perspective. It is all about

Christ.

During this time of year, it is easy to lose perspective. Brothers and sisters keep track of how many and what size presents are under the tree. Neighbors compete for the best outdoor decorations. Even we adults compete over who gets the best presents. Very often we compete over gives the best presents – because we like the recognition that way also. Giving presents, receiving presents, decorating our homes, celebrating the birth of Jesus are all really good things, so long as the focus and perspective remain on Christ.

John has everything in perspective. It is all about Jesus Christ. John's ministry doesn't matter. Nothing else matters, so long as Christ increases. We can learn much from John. It is good to be reminded, especially at Christmas: Nothing else matters. It is all about Jesus Christ. "He must increase, but I must decrease." Amen.