

“Merry Christ Mass”

Luke 1:57-80

In the past weeks, as we have worked our way through the entirety of Luke chapter 1, we have taken a look at the very early life of John the Baptist. When the angel announced to Zechariah that John would be born, the angel said that John’s purpose was to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

In our lesson today, we see that the people greeted the birth of John with awe. And they knew that this child was special. They knew that the Lord’s hand was with him. And Zechariah answers the question **“what then will this child be?”**

In Zechariah’s song of praise to God, he says, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.”

John’s sole purpose in life was to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus Christ; the Son of God who would bring the forgiveness of sins.

As we move through this Advent Season, we ask the question, “How do we as Christians prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ; the Son of God?” Is it just with decorations or presents? Two Sundays ago, we saw how John the Baptist said to prepare for the coming of Christ and the kingdom of God?

He said, “Repent! You brood of vipers!”

Tonight, we are gathered here to repent, to confess our sins before God our Father, and receive absolution, forgiveness from God Himself.

The worship service tonight is called the “Service of Corporate Confession and Absolution.” It is a worship service designed to prepare the people of God for the Eucharist; for Holy Communion.

This being the final midweek Advent service, tonight we prepare for the coming of Christ; we prepare for Christmas. The word “Christmas” literally means “Christ’s Mass.” Some Lutherans sometimes shy away from using the word “Mass” to describe the worship service where we receive the Body and Blood of Christ our Lord. Luther used it. It is the term used in the Augsburg Confession, so we should not be afraid to use it either.

Tonight, we gather to be prepared for Christ’s Mass. The celebration of the Eucharist on Christmas Day is the second highest feast of the church year, surpassed only by the Easter Eucharist.

The receiving of Christ’s Body and Blood is what all of this Christmas preparation has been about. During this Advent Season, we have been preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ. How does Christ come to us? He came to the world as that babe in Bethlehem. On the last day, He will come again from the clouds on high, announced by the trumpets of angels.

But how does He come in the mean time? Christ came to you in Baptism. Christ comes to us in His Word, and in His Body and Blood under the form of bread and wine.

Christmas is about the coming of Christ. Christmas is about Christ’s Mass; the receiving of Christ’s Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins.

Christmas is not worth celebrating if you are not celebrating the

forgiveness of sins. Because of what that child born in Bethlehem did by paying for our transgressions with His own body and blood, we have a reason to celebrate in the days and weeks to come.

As we read today, the people who witnessed the miraculous events surrounding John the Baptist's birth knew that this child was going to be special, because God's hand was with him. That child born to Zechariah and Elizabeth was special – not because his mom was old or that Zechariah couldn't talk for nine months. He was special, unique, set apart by God as the one chosen to prepare the people for the coming of the Christ. John did this by calling them to repent. Repent of your sin and trust in the forgiveness that only God brings.

Since the day that Christ ascended into heaven, the Church has been given the responsibility of preparing the people for the coming of the Lord. We have been called to repent of our sin, and prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ. He comes to us in His Body and Blood, and through that Eucharist meal, He brings to us the forgiveness of sins.

Because of the commercialization of Christmas, and the fact that jolly old St. Nick is now the most recognizable Christmas symbol in our society, we hear Christian people say all of the time, "Put Christ back into Christmas."

That is a good thought and a catchy phrase. But it would be even better if we said, "Put the Mass back into Christmas." It is in the Mass that Christ is found. But there are a lot of churches that have done away with Christmas Day celebrations altogether because it is just an afterthought, an unnecessary extension of the Christmas Eve celebration. How long before it is pushed aside the way All Saints' Day is, with the Eve of all Saints' being the only recognizable holiday in our society over that weekend. Let's put

the Mass back into Christmas. Christ comes to us and nourishes us with His life-giving Body and Blood.

The Advent Season is about preparation for the coming of Christ. He came as the child of Mary to bring forgiveness to the world. He is coming again. In the meantime, forgiveness is found in the Body and Blood of that babe who was born in Bethlehem, and which we partake of in Christ's Mass.

At John's birth, the question was asked, "What then will this child be?" John will be the one who will announce Christ to the world, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." It is for this reason that Christ has come. It is for this reason we celebrate the Christ Mass. Amen.