

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

Advent 3
Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.
December 16, 2020

“He Must Increase, But I Must Decrease”

Malachi 4:1-6; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; John 3:22-36

During these weeks of Advent, we have been preparing. Most of our preparing has been for next Thursday and Friday. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are such festive events in the life of God’s people. Yet, our festivities will be a little different this year. Our children will not be telling the story of the birth of our Lord on Christmas Eve, as they have done each year for many years. We will be having the Candle Light Service on Christmas Eve two times so that everyone who wants to come is availed the opportunity while still properly social distancing.

Part of me is excited that we will get to have that service twice. It is such a beautiful reminder of how the light of Christ has scattered the darkness of sin in our lives. And then the next morning gathering for 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. There certainly are a lot of enjoyable activities and traditions we are missing out on because we are not able to be together.

Even if we cannot have the parties that we are accustomed to have this time of year, I encourage you to remember people with gifts. 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. Having this in mind, understand that Advent and Christmas are not cancelled in the year 2020. The Christ Mass is not diminished because we can’t have parties and share gifts in person.

We did not get to do this service in the way we normally do with individual absolution, however we have not missed out on one of the great gifts the Lord has given to His church – to be absolved of all our of sin. We confess our sins, all of our sins of thought, word, and deed, and our original unrighteousness (the

total corruption of our human nature passed down from Adam through our parents). And then we hear the sweet words of the Gospel – “in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Other than the body and blood of Christ, that is the best gift you are going to get this week.

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, twice in the Gloria in Excelsis and three times in 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. Even we adults compete over who gets the best presents. Very often we compete over giving the best presents – because we like the recognition that way also. Giving presents, receiving presents, celebrating the birth of Jesus are all really good things, so long as the focus and perspective remain on Christ.

Perhaps Christmas of 2020 is a reminder that all of the outside noise of our Christmas traditions must decrease so that Christ and the Christ Mass would increase as the true focus of the season.

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.