

“Advent is Not so Holly, Jolly”

Luke 3:1-14

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We do get an anticipation for the celebration of that blessed event. However, as the organizers of the weekly readings of the church year (we call the lectionary) have repeatedly emphasized, this time of year is a time for you to prepare to see Christ face to face. All

the world around us tells us that we need to focus on community events, flashing lights, shiny decorations, and having a “holly, jolly Christmas.”

But the message of Malachi and John the Baptist need to be heard. Now I am not going to address you like John and say, “You brood of vipers!”, because you are the children of God who possess the faith of Abraham. And as Scripture says, like Abraham, “your faith is credited to you as righteousness.

There is nothing wrong with community events, flashing lights, shiny decorations, and having a “holly, jolly Christmas.” However the flashing light that best fits the theme of Advent is the flashing light of the refiner’s fire that purifies the children of God like gold or silver is purified. That is not a very “holly, jolly” image. But that is the image of Advent. And that is the image of John the Baptist.

“Repent and be baptized.” “Flee from the wrath to come.” “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” John, the Advent prophet, did not come with a holly, jolly message.

However, the message of Advent and being prepared for the end of the world has nothing to do with Mayan calendar nonsense. As I said a couple weeks ago, preparing for Christ to come on the Last Day has nothing to do with figuring out how the earth will be destroyed. It

has nothing to do with acquiring enough canned goods to be ready. Being prepared happens on the personal level.

John's message of repentance is personal. Preparing for Christ to come is a message for you. In our Gospel reading, we hear the crowd ask John, "What then shall we do?" And he answers them with specific actions for tax collectors and soldiers. He tells all of them to share their extra tunic or food. It is like what we saw in New York City with the police officer who gave the boots to the homeless man. That was an act in the spirit of being prepared for Christ to come.

Unfortunately, the follow up to the story was not good. As you probably heard, the homeless man did something with the boots other than wear them. And the ungrateful manner in which he has responded to this act of kindness is shameful. However, his response does not diminish the Christ-like action of the police officer. When we give to others, we cannot control what they do with that gift. All that we can control is our side of the equation.

Preparing your heart for Christ to come is what you are called to do. Your job is not to fix all the ills of our greater society. Your job is for you to be prepared. It is a time to repent. It is a time to forgive. It is a time to fix broken relationships. It is a time to look to Christ and see what He has already done. You have been led to repentance. You have been forgiven by God Himself. Christ has already come and has fixed your broken relationship with God your Father and Creator.

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However, being led to repentance as a faithful child of God is “holy and joyous.” In Christ, you have been set apart. You are different and unique in the midst of this ungrateful, sinful, world. Remain set apart from the world around you, and be prepared. Christ is coming. Amen.

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We do get an anticipation for the celebration of that blessed event. However, as the organizers of the weekly readings of the church year (we call the lectionary) have repeatedly emphasized, this time of year is a time for you to prepare to see Christ face to face. All

the world around us tells us that we need to focus on community events, flashing lights, shiny decorations, and having a “holly, jolly Christmas.”

But the message of Malachi and John the Baptist need to be heard. Now I am not going to address you like John and say, “You brood of vipers!”, because you are the children of God who possess the faith of Abraham. And as Scripture says, like Abraham, “your faith is credited to you as righteousness.

There is nothing wrong with community events, flashing lights, shiny decorations, and having a “holly, jolly Christmas.” However the flashing light that best fits the theme of Advent is the flashing light of the refiner’s fire that purifies the children of God like gold or silver is purified. That is not a very “holly, jolly” image. But that is the image of Advent. And that is the image of John the Baptist.

“Repent and be baptized.” “Flee from the wrath to come.” “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” John, the Advent prophet, did not come with a holly, jolly message.

However, the message of Advent and being prepared for the end of the world has nothing to do with Mayan calendar nonsense. As I said a couple weeks ago, preparing for Christ to come on the Last Day has nothing to do with figuring out how the earth will be destroyed. It

has nothing to do with acquiring enough canned goods to be ready. Being prepared happens on the personal level.

John's message of repentance is personal. Preparing for Christ to come is a message for you. In our Gospel reading, we hear the crowd ask John, "What then shall we do?" And he answers them with specific actions for tax collectors and soldiers. He tells all of them to share their extra tunic or food. It is like what we saw in New York City with the police officer who gave the boots to the homeless man. That was an act in the spirit of being prepared for Christ to come.

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Preparing your heart for Christ to come is what you are called to do. Your job is not to fix all the ills of our greater society. Your job is for you to be prepared. It is a time to repent. It is a time to forgive. It is a time to fix broken relationships. It is a time to look to Christ and see what He has already done. You have been led to repentance. You have been forgiven by God Himself. Christ has already come and has fixed your broken relationship with God your Father and Creator.

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We do get an anticipation for the celebration of that blessed event. However, as the organizers of the weekly readings of the church year (we call the lectionary) have repeatedly emphasized, this time of year is a time for you to prepare to see Christ face to face. All

the world around us tells us that we need to focus on community events, flashing lights, shiny decorations, and having a “holly, jolly Christmas.”

But the message of Malachi and John the Baptist need to be heard. Now I am not going to address you like John and say, “You brood of vipers!”, because you are the children of God who possess the faith of Abraham. And as Scripture says, like Abraham, “your faith is credited to you as righteousness.

There is nothing wrong with community events, flashing lights, shiny decorations, and having a “holly, jolly Christmas.” However the flashing light that best fits the theme of Advent is the flashing light of the refiner’s fire that purifies the children of God like gold or silver is purified. That is not a very “holly, jolly” image. But that is the image of Advent. And that is the image of John the Baptist.

“Repent and be baptized.” “Flee from the wrath to come.” “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” John, the Advent prophet, did not come with a holly, jolly message.

However, the message of Advent and being prepared for the end of the world has nothing to do with Mayan calendar nonsense. As I said a couple weeks ago, preparing for Christ to come on the Last Day has nothing to do with figuring out how the earth will be destroyed. It

has nothing to do with acquiring enough canned goods to be ready. Being prepared happens on the personal level.

John's message of repentance is personal. Preparing for Christ to come is a message for you. In our Gospel reading, we hear the crowd ask John, "What then shall we do?" And he answers them with specific actions for tax collectors and soldiers. He tells all of them to share their extra tunic or food. It is like what we saw in New York City with the police officer who gave the boots to the homeless man. That was an act in the spirit of being prepared for Christ to come.

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Preparing your heart for Christ to come is what you are called to do. Your job is not to fix all the ills of our greater society. Your job is for you to be prepared. It is a time to repent. It is a time to forgive. It is a time to fix broken relationships. It is a time to look to Christ and see what He has already done. You have been led to repentance. You have been forgiven by God Himself. Christ has already come and has fixed your broken relationship with God your Father and Creator.

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Recently, in our Sunday morning Bible Class, as we focus on “Why we do what we do,” the question has arisen, “Why do we have the appointed readings that we do?” Especially this time of year, we get several weeks of Judgment Day. For the past three weeks, even before Advent started, our focus has been Christ coming, the first heaven and first earth being destroyed, and the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. That ultimately is the goal. That is the end of the story we tell each year as we move through the church year calendar.

We read the appointed lessons for today, and still no Christmas stories. Do you know why? It’s because this is Advent. Malachi says, “Who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears?” Now Malachi also references the coming of John the Baptist – the messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord.

We do get an anticipation for the celebration of that blessed event. However, as the organizers of the weekly readings of the church year (we call the lectionary) have repeatedly emphasized, this time of year is a time for you to prepare to see Christ face to face. All

the world around us tells us that we need to focus on community events, flashing lights, shiny decorations, and having a “holly, jolly Christmas.”

But the message of Malachi and John the Baptist need to be heard. Now I am not going to address you like John and say, “You brood of vipers!”, because you are the children of God who possess the faith of Abraham. And as Scripture says, like Abraham, “your faith is credited to you as righteousness.

There is nothing wrong with community events, flashing lights, shiny decorations, and having a “holly, jolly Christmas.” However the flashing light that best fits the theme of Advent is the flashing light of the refiner’s fire that purifies the children of God like gold or silver is purified. That is not a very “holly, jolly” image. But that is the image of Advent. And that is the image of John the Baptist.

“Repent and be baptized.” “Flee from the wrath to come.” “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” John, the Advent prophet, did not come with a holly, jolly message.

However, the message of Advent and being prepared for the end of the world has nothing to do with Mayan calendar nonsense. As I said a couple weeks ago, preparing for Christ to come on the Last Day has nothing to do with figuring out how the earth will be destroyed. It

has nothing to do with acquiring enough canned goods to be ready. Being prepared happens on the personal level.

John's message of repentance is personal. Preparing for Christ to come is a message for you. In our Gospel reading, we hear the crowd ask John, "What then shall we do?" And he answers them with specific actions for tax collectors and soldiers. He tells all of them to share their extra tunic or food. It is like what we saw in New York City with the police officer who gave the boots to the homeless man. That was an act in the spirit of being prepared for Christ to come.

Unfortunately, the follow up to the story was not good. As you probably heard, the homeless man did something with the boots other than wear them. And the ungrateful manner in which he has responded to this act of kindness is shameful. However, his response does not diminish the Christ-like action of the police officer. When we give to others, we cannot control what they do with that gift. All that we can control is our side of the equation.

Preparing your heart for Christ to come is what you are called to do. Your job is not to fix all the ills of our greater society. Your job is for you to be prepared. It is a time to repent. It is a time to forgive. It is a time to fix broken relationships. It is a time to look to Christ and see what He has already done. You have been led to repentance. You have been forgiven by God Himself. Christ has already come and has fixed your broken relationship with God your Father and Creator.

The call to repentance is personal. It is about you. You are a child of God with the faith of Abraham. Your faith has been credited to you as righteousness. In response to this new reality, you are the tree that must bear good fruit. That is how you prepare for the coming of Christ. You cannot control what others do around you. You cannot control how others react to your actions.

What John the Baptist said to the tax collectors and soldiers and the crowd gathered around him was instruction on what a life of repentance and faith means. This is how you are to be whether those around you are grateful or ungrateful. Being refined by fire is not “holly, jolly.”

However, being led to repentance as a faithful child of God is “holy and joyous.” In Christ, you have been set apart. You are different and unique in the midst of this ungrateful, sinful, world. Remain set apart from the world around you, and be prepared. Christ is coming. Amen.

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