

“Merry Christ Mass”

John 1:1-14

Merry Christmas!!

During the weeks of Advent, during our Wednesday evening services, we worked our way through the entirety of Luke chapter 1. We took a look at the 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.”

The people greeted the birth of John the Baptist with awe. And they knew that this child was special. Today, like last night, we celebrate the birth of a different child – the Christ-child. The shepherds who heard the message of angels knew that this child born in Bethlehem was special and they greeted His birth with awe.

John the Baptist’s sole purpose in life was to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus Christ; the Son of God. And throughout this Advent season, we have asked the question, “How do we, as God’s people, prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ; the Son of God?” Is it simply with

decorations or presents? Three Sundays ago, we saw how John the Baptist said to prepare for the coming of Christ and the kingdom of God? He said, "Repent!"

Last Wednesday, we gathered here to repent of our sins, to confess our sins before God our Father, and receive absolution, forgiveness from God Himself -- as we prepared for this morning's Eucharist during the Service of Corporate Confession and Absolution. We came prepared.

All throughout this Advent Season, we have been preparing for the coming of Christ; we have prepared for Christmas, because, like that child born in Bethlehem, this day is special. This is not simply just "one more service to go to over the holiday season." As I said last Wednesday, the word "Christmas" literally means "Christ's Mass." And as Lutherans, we 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.

Today is Christ's Mass. The celebration of the Eucharist on Christmas Day is the second highest feast of the church year, surpassed only the Easter.

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 Christ. We have been preparing to see the Light of the world. What a festive evening we had last night as the light of Christ was shared through the mouths of children and the glow of candles.

This morning we celebrate that Christ has come to us. How does Christ come to us? He came to us as that babe in Bethlehem, which we celebrate this morning. On the last day, He will come to us from the clouds on high, announced by the trumpets of angels.

But how does He come in the mean time? Christ comes to us in His Word, and in His Body and Blood. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He still comes to us in the flesh – under the form of bread and wine.

He comes to us in the Christ Mass; the receiving of Christ's Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. This is "reason for the season."

The focus of Christmas is to be on the forgiveness of sins, because of what that child born in Bethlehem did by paying for our transgressions with His own blood.

As we have looked back at John the Baptist this past Advent Season,

he was the one chosen to prepare the people for the coming of the Christ.

Since the day that Christ ascended into heaven, the Church has been given the responsibility of preparing the people for the coming of the Christ. We have been called to repent of our sin, and prepare ourselves for His second coming. But, in the mean time, He continues to come to us in His Body and Blood. The Word became flesh and continues dwell among us. He continues to bring to us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

As I said on Wednesday, 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."

As I said, that is 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 comes to us and nourishes us with His life-giving Body and Blood.

Christmas is really all about forgiveness. Forgiveness is found in the Body and Blood of that babe who was born in Bethlehem, and forgiveness is found in the Body and Blood of the Christ Mass. Have a Merry Christ Mass. Amen.