

***Sermon for Advent 3, Year A
Give Christmas to Christ By
Giving Christ To The World***

Christmas is on the way, but Advent says, “Not so fast, my friend!”

Advent is an intentional time in the church to prepare us for the birth of Christ. It is a necessary reminder that Christmas is about God coming to us and reaching for us.

Advent is a time for the followers of Christ to examine our hearts and lives in anticipation of Christ’s coming.

That is why Advent is a deeply spiritual and significant season of the church year. Some of you have told me that Advent is your favorite of the church seasons.

At Faith Lutheran Church, we believe that Christ can still change the world. In fact, we believe that Christ is the only thing that can really change the world. So, we are committed to learning and worshiping with a goal of giving Christmas to Christ by giving Christ to the world.

What are the implications for us? First and foremost is to remember that Christmas is a God thing. Christmas starts with Christ. As

followers of Christ it falls to us to help the world see what God has done for us at Christmas. We want to give Christmas to Christ by giving Christ to the world.

And we do that by sharing our faith, by having intentional conversations about God and by inviting our friends and co-workers to worship.

Now, beware. There is no real point in haranguing people about missing the true meaning of Christmas. Most people feel bad enough about something already.

And now we have the cultural issue of do you say “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Holidays?” The truth of the matter is that the whole world could say “Merry Christmas” and keep on shopping and spending and eating and drinking and decorating and partying without ever getting anywhere near Bethlehem and the birth of our Savior.

The day has long passed when the church has the defining voice in how the world observes Christmas.

However, the time for us as people of faith to point toward the birth of Christ as God’s great gift to free us from the power of sin and death is always at hand...and never more

so than right now. In this holy season with a heightened spiritual sense, even our unchurched family and friends may be trying to make a connection with God and maybe even the church.

So just like John the Baptizer, point to Jesus. Tell your family, your friends, your schoolmates, tell them what God has done and is doing in your life. Share why you come to church. Tell your story. Don't embellish it. Be honest and share your faith.

We get so caught up this time of year in buying just the perfect gift. The perfect gift is you sharing your faith with someone who wants to talk about God.

The best gift that we can give to our friends and family and co-workers is Christ. Let us give Christmas to Christ by giving Christ to the world.

In your own way and with your own words, you can proclaim the same message as good ol' John the Baptizer. He preached, "Repent and be baptized. Christ is coming. Prepare the way of the Lord."

I like to imagine if John the Baptizer were alive today. I thought the other day about him setting up camp in the middle of

West Town Mall. Here's how it might go:

Now image this. In comes John, right into the mall. It is winter, so cold outside. But he's wearing sandals on his bare feet and yes, he's wearing a camel skin cloak, tied with a leather girdle.

With determination, he strides through those double doors of the mall and marches over to the big open space and he's crying out, "Repent!" And the crowds begin to stop and look at him because he's so loud and unusual.

"Disgraceful! So dirty! Unreal! What is this awful homeless man got to do with Christmas? Get him out of here so we can get our shopping done."

But wait, this John is a powerful preacher. The adults cease their frantic shopping and start to gather around him and listen.

The teenagers stop their wandering to laugh at him at first, but then they find themselves listening.

The children hear him and they leave Santa's line, tugging on their parent's coats and asking questions: "What's he doing here? What's he saying?"

As John begins to cry out, his voice echoes through the mall: “Repent! Turn around! Change your lives!”

And dear John is such a powerful preacher that the lights, the carols, the displays, the shopping, the food court, even Santa’s line, all are forgotten. The people begin to lean in to hear him and they ask him, “What shall we do?”

And John says, “Repent and be baptized.” And then he begins to baptize them, right in that beautiful mall fountain. And he tells them, “I baptize you with water, but one is a coming who will baptize you with fire and the Holy Spirit.”

Instead of looking for just the right gift at the mall, look for John. Give Christmas to Christ by giving Christ to the world.