

3rd Sun Ad A

What Is Xmas About?

Gift-Giving

Introduction...

What do you want for Christmas?...

A fair enough question for this time of year...

Many people in our country spend the weeks before Christmas figuring out what they are going to purchase for their loved ones.

We meander thru the Malls to purchase our gifts, fight the traffic, go home and wrap them.

Or we go to the Internet to do our shopping... saves on gas and agida!

We eagerly anticipate the response of those who receive these gifts.

Is that what Christmas is about... a commercialized, gift-giving holiday?

Some would even suggest that Christmas is about keeping the American economy humming!

Many people today are saying,

“Stop! What is the Reason for the Season?

Jesus! Christmas is about Jesus.”

And so we turn to the Church to teach us about Christmas.

Advent time is the Catholic *preparation* for Christmas.

So... what does Advent tell us about the meaning of Christmas?

I Advent and the Coming of God

When we look at the Scripture passages and especially the Gospels for Advent, we can get confused...

First Sun of Advent.... Jesus is coming back

Second and Third Sun of Advent... John the Baptist announces the coming of Jesus into His public ministry

Fourth Sun of Advent... Ah finally, some of the story about Jesus' birth – what we thought Christmas was really about.

Why does Advent present the other Gospels which do not speak about Jesus' Birth?

I A Many Layered Coming of Jesus

I believe the Church wants to teach us that Christmas **is** about God's coming among us... that we are special to God... that God created us and loves us and sees our need for God's redeeming grace...

After all, look at the sinfulness, the brokenness of the world – we need help....

We can't save ourselves... we've been trying forever, and we end up in messes –

Read the paper today or check your smart phone if you don't believe we need God...

And so *Christmas* is about God's coming into our world. But that coming is many layered.

The second and third *Advent* Sundays remind us that God's hasn't gone underground after Jesus is born... When Jesus is thirty years old he will come back into the spotlight.

The first Advent Sunday points to the future. Jesus will come again and make things right. Jesus will restore all things and bring a new heaven and a new earth... no more tears, no more suffering, no more arthritis! (Rev 22)

II The Meaning of God's Kingdom

Advent reminds us about the *meaning* of the coming of God among us....

When Jesus came in His public ministry He preached about the coming of His Father's Kingdom. What's that mean?

Jesus brought God's compassion and healing, peace and justice to this world.

We hear about this in today's Gospel...

Jesus says... The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.

Advent points us to the many layered meanings of the coming of Christ at Christmas... all of those meanings point to the fact that God is among us.

III Our Part in Advent

What is our part in Advent?

We live in between times....

Between the earthly coming of Jesus and his return at the end time.

What does that mean to us who follow Jesus?

It's our job to continue Jesus' work...

with God's help to continue bringing God's compassion and care, understanding and love, peacefulness and forgiveness, justice and fairness – God's Kingdom – into our world....

Our family, our neighborhood, our workplace, our school, our city and county...

What a challenge?

Let me tell you about a woman whose funeral I celebrated several years ago.

Her name was Jo Ann, and she was a native Pittsburgher...

She died young, in her 60's.

I don't want to say she was a saint...

but I do want to say that she tried her best to be the kind of person God wants us to be in our world...

the kind of person Jesus helps us to be in our world.

She was a good mother and grandmother... loving and concerned. She was a good worker. One of her fellow employees – a younger woman – told me how she was kind and considerate on the job... and never forgot a birthday of the folks in the office...

She was active in local politics and headed the Chamber of Commerce of the locality where she lived...

She wanted her neighborhood to be a good place to live, and worked hard to make that happen...

God gave her many gifts, and she used them well in her family, on her job, and in her neighborhood....

In terms of Jesus and God's Kingdom, I would say that she helped to continue the work of Jesus and bring God's Kingdom to her world.

Conclusion...

Jo Ann leaves us a grace-filled example of the meaning of Advent as we prepare for the coming of Jesus...

God comes among us in the birth, and in the life and ministry of Jesus... and while we await Jesus' return, our job is to continue the work of Jesus, with His help...

Of course we can't do this by ourselves... we are broken – all of us – we all have some parts missing.

But loving God knows that... and so...

God gifts us with God's Son.

God's Son gifts us with healing love and compassion.

What are some other of your talents/gifts that God has blessed you with... humor, intelligence, patience, compassion, caring, computer skills, friendliness... we could go on and on...

The questions are, "Are you aware of your giftedness and how can you use your gifts/talents and blessings to bring God's life into our world, how you can bring more light than darkness into our world, how you can continue the mission of Jesus?"

We are called to gift each other thru our lives and actions...

Finally... as we look at our giving of Christmas gifts we see in them a faint reflection of God's greatest gift to us... His beloved Son, Jesus, born in a stable, wrapped in a coarse blanket cared for by poor and faithful parents, surrounded by poor but awe filled shepherds... with the sound of angels singing in the background.

As we come to this Eucharist may Jesus continue to gift us with His own Body and Blood, which will bless us, heal us, and strengthen us to follow in Jesus' footsteps in our world, as we prepare to remember His coming among us on Christmas Day.