

2nd S. in Advent 12/5/21
 Luke 3:1-20 B

“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS: ‘PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT. EVERY VALLEY SHALL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL SHALL BE MADE LOW, AND THE CROOKED SHALL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH PLACES SHALL BECOME LEVEL WAYS, AND ALL FLESH SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.’”

It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas. And you know what that means, right? Jolly ol’ Saint Nic is coming to town.

He's making a list,
 He's checking it twice,
 He's gonna find out who's naughty or nice
 Santa Claus is coming to town

He sees you when you're sleeping
 And he knows when you're awake
 He knows if you've been bad or good
 So be good for goodness sake

When you look at the words to that song, you quickly learn that Christmas from the perspective of Santa Claus is for people on the nice list. Ol’ Saint Nic comes only for the good boys and girls, and they are going to get things like a Play Station 5, Dior Michael Jordan shoes, Under Armour clothes, gold jewelry. The best that those bad boys and girls on the naughty list can hope for is a lump of coal in their stocking on Christmas morning.

So, My Friends, which list are you on? As you ponder your answer to that question, let me ask you another question: **Who is Christmas for?**

As you answer that question, keep in mind that God’s holiness demands perfection in thought, word, and deed. Jesus said, “You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). To be on God’s nice

list, you must perfectly love God and perfectly love your neighbor, even that neighbor that annoys you.

So, how you doin' with that? Have you worried, been fearful, filled with resentment? That's your reaction to you not getting your way; to your not being in charge; to you not being God. Have you doubted the promises of God's Word? Been angry, and allowed the sun to go down on that anger? Lusted? Ignored your neighbor in their need? Gossiped about your neighbor, just so you could feel better about yourself? Been jealous? Filled with envy?

Which list is it that you are on? If we are honest with ourselves, it's pretty obvious that you and I are on the naughty list. You don't have to take my word for it. You confessed that truth this morning:

"I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment."

And that is **bad** news for you and for me. According to the Santa Claus theology of this present age, Christmas is only for those on the good list and that means Christmas is **not** for you and me.

But, God has good news for you, Dear Child of God:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God'" (vv.4-6).

Every year since the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, John the Baptist has come and pointed us to the salvation of our God. That salvation comes to us in the person and work of the one mightier than John; the one whose sandals John is not worthy to stoop down and untie.

God's salvation comes to us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ as He is born in that Bethlehem stable.

The Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus did not come on that Christmas long ago for those on the good list, but those on the naughty list. He came for the ungodly. He came for the unrighteous. He came for sinners.

There is an old Norwegian theologian named Fredrick Wisloff, who said it this way,

“Had there been no sin on earth, there would have been no Christmas. Had there been no sinners, there would have been no need of a Savior. For this very reason, the Christmas Gospel is a message for sinners. And only those who acknowledge their sins can understand the true meaning of Christmas.”

Rejoice and be glad, My Friends, God does not meet your sin with a lump of coal. He doesn't even meet your sins with the temporal and eternal punishment your sins deserve. Rather, He gives you Jesus, Who had no sin, but Whom He made to be sin for you. Jesus took on all of your sin, was nailed to Calvary's cross for them. The axe of God's wrath and anger was poured out on Jesus. And that viper, Satan, who by the tree once overcame, was by the tree of the cross overcome.

That is the good and glorious news of Advent and Christmas! And that means, Dear Child of God, that Christmas is for you!

And because Christmas is for you, it means that you are a baptized child of God. Forgiven and restored. Brought into His fold. You are His children who are prepared for His coming by bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. You, *you*, are on God's nice list, for your name is written in the Lamb's book of life.

What then shall we do? Look at the repentance, the change of

lifestyle, and the fruits of that repentance those baptized by John are bearing. Those who have clothing and foods are sharing with those who have none. The tax collectors are collecting only what is required; in other words, they are padding their own pockets by collecting more for themselves. The soldiers, too, are content with their wages and not using their vocation to steal from their neighbor.

The same thing that happened at the Jordan is happening here. The Holy Spirit, by Word and Sacrament, has brought you to repentance so that you bear fruit in keeping with repentance as you love God and your neighbor, as a Mom, Dad, child, grandparent, student, coal miner, farmer -- in whatever vocations God has placed you in.

Living and moving and having your being in Christ Jesus, you are on God's nice list. And that expresses itself in your daily life. That means you are not filled with fear of men and the darkness of this present age, but you fear, love, and trust in God above all things. You don't use satanic arts to see what the future holds. You don't listen to the lies of the father of all lies, but you believe and trust the promises of God's Word. Students, you do serve and obey your parents and teachers and coaches. Your love for your neighbor means that you keep no -- no -- record of wrongs, but you forgive as God has forgiven you in Christ. Husband and wife do love and honor each other. You do help your neighbor to improve and protect their property. You don't gossip, but explain all of your neighbor's actions in the kindest, nicest way. And you don't play the lottery to get rich, because you are content and satisfied with stuff and life God has given you.

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. And you know what that means, right? It means that you can see the salvation of God in Jesus, at His birth in Bethlehem. And He's coming for you, which means Christmas

is for you. He is the one who absorbs all the wrath of God for your sin upon His own body; forgives you all your sin; and raises you from the death of your sin to live in Him, so that you can live in the blessed hope of heaven, and, today, bear fruits in keeping with repentance.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.