

JJ¹

It's been 20 years since you got a new lease on life. You were in a terrible car accident. On top of crashing, you were knocked unconscious and the car had started on fire. When you woke up, you found yourself in the back of an ambulance being rushed to a hospital. A stranger had pulled you from the car, gave his statement to the police, and disappeared. You never talked much about it with your spouse, and never mentioned it to your children.

But 20 years later you tracked down that person and were going to meet them. He was coming over for dinner. You and the family clean the house like crazy. But the kids don't understand why *everything* needed to be picked up. "You'll understand soon," you say. Then he comes and you introduce your children to the man saying, "Kids, I'd like you to meet the man who saved my life and made it possible for you to be here today!"

Suddenly the kids understand why you all worked so hard to clean the house and make all the other preparations for him to come.

Friends, by nature we're just like those little kids when it comes to Christmas. Sadly, even now as God's children, we're

all too often just like those little kids when it comes to Christmas. We so easily don't understand why we need to make any preparations beyond decorating, baking cookies and buying gifts. It's so easy for us to get caught up in our society's production of Christmas that we rob ourselves of the greatest joy that can be had at Christmas. Understand that Christmas can't have any meaning if we don't see the reason Christmas happened in the first place.

John the Baptist comes to us yet today to remind us why Christmas had to happen. "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near." Repentance was needed when sin came crashing into God's perfect and beautiful creation when Adam and Eve fell. Even though repentance has been needed since nearly the beginning of time, it's not something any one of us has any desire to do on our own.

You see, repentance isn't just saying, "I'm sorry," as important as those words are. Repentance is all about making preparations for a special guest. It's all about cleaning house.

Repentance recognizes that there needs to be Christmas *because* of you and *because* of me. To repent is to take an honest look in the mirror of God's law and see what's

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

looking back—a lawbreaker. To repent is to acknowledge your sin to God and recognize you should go to hell because of your sin. To repent is also turning in faith to Jesus, recognizing your desperate need for him as your Savior.

Sadly, this kind of preparation for Christmas isn't something that people like to do, myself included. We're, again, just like little kids who won't say they're sorry. I can remember a time we were visit-

ing with friends and their 5 year old hit me. I wasn't hurt, but his parents rightly made him apologize. The thing is, it took him 30 minutes to do it! He cried, not because I was threatening to slug him back, but because his sinful nature didn't want to acknowledge his sin. Even as adults we do the same thing because repentance is painful. My sinful nature doesn't want to admit it's failures and fess up to it's sin. None of us likes to admit that there is something terribly wrong with us, so terribly wrong that even at this time of year when our hearts should be drawn to the what's most important we lose sight and forget to put Christ in our Christmas except for a couple hours when we come into this house of worship! Friends, we can't rejoice in God our Savior unless we first realize how badly we need God our Savior—how badly we need Christmas!



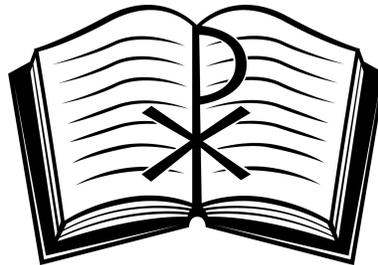
To see how badly we need Christmas, all we have to do is look at John's message before us today. John didn't mince any words in his sermons, did he? "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit in keeping with repentance! Do not think of saying to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. Already the ax is ready to strike the root of the

trees. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Friends, a very important guest is coming at Christmas, and will again on the Last Day. Now is the time to **MAKE PREPARATIONS** and clean house. In our baptisms, God cleaned our house. In fact, he built us a brand new house. He brought us into his family, forgiving all our sins. But this spiritual

house is much like any earthly house. A clean house isn't just about getting the best builder around. If you don't take care of it, it won't take long for it to start falling apart and be ruined. If the roof has caved in and there's moss and shrubbery growing in it, you can't just say, "Well, it's a Frank Lloyd Wright house, so it's all good." It's junk. So too with your spiritual house if you don't care for it or clean it.

That was the problem with the Pharisees and Sadducees who came out to John. On the outside they looked great, but on the inside they were a spiritual mess. Chiefly because they didn't see that they had any need for Christmas. They thought their bloodline and good works would satisfy God. We can fall into these same dangerous temptations. If you think because you're baptized you don't need to be concerned about your sin, you've got some cleaning to do before Jesus comes. If you think being a member at St. John or of the WELS makes you good to go, you've got some cleaning to do before Jesus comes. If you think you did your bit for king and country by going to Catechism Class and no longer need to study God's Word, you've got some cleaning to do before Jesus comes.



Baptism isn't a license to sin or an excuse to think little of your sins. Then you don't understand what your baptism is. Membership here doesn't equal membership in heaven. Then you don't understand the role of congregations and what The Church of Christ is. The study of God's Word is to be a life-long endeavor. If you don't understand that, friends, then the rot is growing and not being held at bay or even killed.

Friends, the only way we'll see the value and can treasure Christmas, the only way we'll be ready to celebrate Jesus' first coming and be ready for him to come

again is to clean our spiritual houses through repentance. And the wonderful thing when we repent is that we're not just confessing to any ear that will listen, but to the One who can actually do something about it!

That was essentially John's point when he said, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But the one who comes after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." John wasn't putting himself down or his work. He was simply emphasizing the fact that

he was the instrument and not the power behind it all. He was the one getting things ready for the one who could actually do something about our sin. That's why Jesus came. That's why that baby born in a stable and placed in a manger was later nailed to

a cross, died and rose three days later!

Friends, as we turn to our Lord in repentance, he cleans our spiritual house. We receive the assurance that he is ours and we are his. He assures us that he is the one who saved our lives so long ago in giving up his own life! Knowing what he has done to save us shows us what makes Christmas so important and worth celebrating. It's the day we celebrate God coming into this world to give us a new lease on life.

Friends, go and live in your baptismal grace at all times, and especially now at

Christmas time. Invite the world around you to come and meet the man who saved your life, your eternal life. **Make your preparations** because **JESUS IS COMING**. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.