

December 16-17, 2006
Third Sunday in Advent, Year C
Luke 3:7-18
“Are You Ready For Christmas?”
Marilyn A. Tye

Dear friends in Christ ... grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Are you **ready**?” “Are **YOU** ready?”

We were standing in our red choir robes in the narthex of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Richmond, Indiana back in the early '80s ... getting ready to process in for the 10:30 a.m. service for the Third Sunday in Advent. There we were ... Pastor Bob Linstrom ... the acolytes with their tapers ... the banner bearers ... for the procession down the center aisle to begin the service ... people were still coming in for the service ... shivering in the cold December air. The organist was playing the Prelude ... getting ready to begin the processional hymn.

Marcene Linstrom, Pastor Bob's wife, and I had our heads together ... commiserating with each other ... our whispers were agitated ...

“Are you ready for Christmas,” she asked me? “No”, I replied, “are you”? “No ... I still have to finish the shopping, the baking, the cards ... I'm just not ready for Christmas” she said. We stood there, shaking our heads, other choir members joining into the “not ready” chorus.

Joe Backmeyer, the organist, started playing the opening hymn as we lined up and walked down the aisle to the choir pews up front, behind the altar. The candles flickered as we climbed the stairs and got into the pews, facing the congregation.

My mind was whirling with my “to do” list ... shopping ... cookies ... finish the cards ... and don't forget the yeast for the Stollen ... our family's treasured old recipe from my German grandma that still needed to be baked.

Pastor Bob read the Gospel lesson and as we sat down for the sermon, he turned his head toward the choir behind him ... looked at Marcene and me ... and said ... “Christmas is coming whether you're ready or not”.

Our red faces matched our choir robes ...

He was right ... Christmas is coming ... ready or not ... true then ... true now.

I could stand here and go on and on about how the “holiday” ... heaven forbid in this day and age of political correctness that we can still call it what it is ... CHRISTMAS.

Black Friday ... shop here ... shop there ... diamonds ... clothing ... make the merchants' year a good one ... spend here ... spend there ... bake ... cook ... cards ... presents ... Christmas is coming ... the goose is getting fat ... whoops ... wrong song.

Has something gotten lost in our modern translation of Christmas “or as it's called in our modern vernacular “the holidays????

Christmas is coming ... **thank God** ... and we are in the third week of our preparation ... of waiting ... of wanting ... what??? A birth ... a baby boy ... and love ... and grace.

Condense the nine months of pregnancy into four weeks. Right now, Mary would be in about her sixth month. Her rounded midsection shows that she's “expecting” ... as was said in the days gone by. She doesn't have swollen ankles yet ... but she's feeling the miracle of movement. A kick here ... a kick there ... the baby hasn't started to stretch yet ... just paddle around ... waiting to grow ... waiting to be born ... unfolding within her body ... and she's waiting ... preparing ... and anticipating ...

And then we run smack dab into today's Gospel lesson ... John the Baptist ... ranting ... calling those who have come to hear him and to be baptized ... **a brood of vipers?** Folks ... where I come from ... them's snakes ... and I'm scared to death of them.

But in the words of John, we can hear love ... love one another ... be fair ... don't rely on excuses ... if you have two coats ... give one to someone who has NO coat ... if you have food and another has none ... let them do likewise ...

Tax collectors came to be baptized ... “Teacher ... what shall we do?” John told them ... “collect no more than is appointed to you” ...

If we really hear God's word and sincerely repent perhaps we would ask the same questions as the crowd. Sometimes it seems that with our Lutheran idea of salvation freely given by God's grace through faith for Christ's sake, that we forget to ask what we are to do to respond to that grace, how we are to act in our faith response, what would Jesus have us do to show the fruit of that faith we have by God's word and sacraments. Christmas is a fitting time to ask these kinds of questions ... for we're already getting in the love action mood this time of year.

And here we are ... here in the Fellowship hall at Christ Lutheran Church. It's the third week in Advent, as we can see by the lighted candles on the altar. We, like John the Baptist, and those who came to be baptized by him, are awaiting both the child and the man who will become the focus of our love ... through OUR baptism. We are to be the singers of God's love ... through the birth of the tiny baby boy who was placed in the manger.

God's love ... John chapter 3 verse 16 ... for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son ... that those who believe will not perish but will have everlasting life ... and that love that God gives to us can be taken out into the world ... mittens on the mitten tree along with sweatshirts and warm scarves ... the food collection every month

that goes to the Food Pantry ... gifts from our members to men and women at American Lutheran Home and Dunn County Health Care Center ... for those who have no families to give them a gift ... the gift of the Chancel Choir last Sunday ... gentle ... soaring ... wishes for Christmas ...

The ultimate gift is being given to us ... the baby ... in the manger ... and the man who will die on the cross for our sins. Our baptism ... our washing ... and the meal prepared for us here today ... those are the gifts of love that we receive ... from Easter to Advent to Christmas ... the circle of love ...

Love ... the incredible love of God our Father who sent his Son ...

Some children were asked what love is. The responses were quite interesting and instructive for us adults. One said, "Love is when my mommy makes a cup of coffee for my daddy and takes a little taste before she gives it to him to make sure it tastes okay."

Another said, "Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you've left him alone all day."

Another response was, "You really shouldn't say, 'I love you' unless you really mean it, but if you mean it you should say it a lot ... people forget."

One boy said, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth."

And finally 7 year old Bobby said, "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."

Are you ready ... really ready for Christmas? Here in this place, and in your place and in my place ... as we make ready for Christmas ... after all the preparation ... all we have to do is ... listen ... for the love ... and the grace ...

Amen.