

Editor

Rev. Daniel Guagenti
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Shelbyville, KY

Contributors

Rev. Matthew Brackman
Peace Lutheran Church, Texas City, TX

Rev. Eric Brown
Zion Lutheran Church, Lahoma, OK

Rev. Andrew Guagenti
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Bardstown, KY

Rev. Daniel Guagenti
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Shelbyville, KY

Rev. Christopher Jackson
St. John's Lutheran Church, Lexington, KY

Rev. William Sabol
Trinity Lutheran Church, Jasper, MN

Rev. Ray Salemink
Trinity Lutheran Church, Ellettsville, IN

Rev. Richard J. Serina, Jr.
Trinity Lutheran Church, Albany, TX

Rev. Charles St-Onge
Memorial Lutheran Church, Houston, TX

All I want for Christmas is...



*“As each has received a
gift, use it to serve one
another, as good stewards
of God’s varied grace.”*

I Peter 4:10

An Advent Devotional
December 8 – 13

All I want for Christmas is...

Mercy

Read Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah was aggravated. He had not wanted to go to Nineveh in the first place. Then he got swallowed by a fish. That was fun. Then he had to wander around a strange land and warn strangers that God was going to smite them for their wickedness. And guess what happened: the people repented, and God did not wipe them out. Jonah was upset—all this work and hassle, and not even some good fire and brimstone fireworks to show for it.

Thus God taught Jonah a little lesson with a plant and a worm. Jonah sulked, and God gave him a plant for shade. God sent a worm to kill the plant, and Jonah was upset again. Then God said to Jonah, “If you are upset over a day-old plant being destroyed, how upset would I be over a city of 120,000 people?”

From this, Jonah saw and understood what lies at the heart of mercy. God is merciful toward people because He loves us and values us. He created us and enjoys His creation. God does not desire horrors and wrath for us—that is not what God created us for. Rather, He desires to act for our benefit.

For us to be merciful as God is merciful, we must keep a lid on our anger. Because Jonah was angry, he no longer saw the value in the people of Nineveh. Especially when anger wells up in us, we ought to remember the value God places upon us and the mercy He shows us. And from this, we should strive to show love, demonstrating the value and love God has even for those who aggravate.

We pray

Heavenly Father, focus our eyes upon your mercy, that we might be ready to have mercy upon those who are in our lives. This we pray in the Name of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

All I want for Christmas is...

Generosity

Read John 13:1-6

As I was preparing for Holy Week last March, I really noticed John 13:3 for the first time. We are told that Jesus knew that *all things* had been given into His hands by the Father. This is a staggering statement. Jesus states here that He is the King of All Creation. He has been anointed by the Father to be the Ruler of All. What would you do if you were given absolute power—honestly? I do not think we would do what Jesus did. He got up and performed one of the most menial, disgusting tasks imaginable: He washed twelve pairs of travel-worn feet, including the pair of the one who would shortly betray Him!

This is generosity. Jesus was born in the manger of Bethlehem for one purpose – to pay for our sins on the cross of Calvary. He paid that price, not with gold or silver, but with His precious, innocent blood. He gave us heaven, purely out of His divine goodness and mercy. If Jesus had never given us anything else, we would still be blest beyond anything conceivable.

But Jesus’ generosity does not stop at the cross and the empty tomb. For He not only gives us heaven, He gives us our daily bread. And not just any daily bread, but gifts which flow abundantly from His grace. We could survive on simple foods, like bread and water. Yet daily we feast on the abundance of this land. We could survive in tents or caves, yet our Lord has bestowed on us well-built houses. We could survive in a country with dictators for leaders, but we dwell in a land where freedoms abound.

All good gifts around us stem from heaven above, St. James reminds us. Let us thank our Lord, for all that He has generously given to each of us every day.

We pray

Savior of the nations, come, Virgin’s Son, make here Your home! Marvel now, O heav’n and earth, That the Lord Chose such a birth. (LSB 332:1)

All I want for Christmas is...

Justice

Read Isaiah 61:1-8

We can say many things about justice. We know that it is suppose to go hand in hand with Truth and the “American Way.” We say that it is supposed to be blind. And a lot of times, when we think of justice, we think of someone getting their “just” desserts, be they a villain or a criminal sent to the pen. Justice, we think, deals primarily with making sure that bad people get punished.

However, when God deals with us in His justice, we should not as Christians begin shaking in our boots, worrying about being sent up the river to the eternal penitentiary of hell. Rather, when Scripture speaks of God showing justice, His approach is that of rescuing us from the downfalls of wickedness.

God hates robbery and wrong—and the chief robbery of all time was Satan tempting and stealing Adam and Eve (and us) away by temptation in the Garden. God, as a God who loves justice, must put this to rights, and He must reclaim mankind, for we rightfully belong to Him. This is what God continually promised His people over and over. This is what He accomplished through the death and resurrection of His Son.

Thus we can see and understand what justice truly is. Rather than primarily a punishment, justice is putting things right, making things the way they should be. This justice should be part of our focus as Christians, as we strive to make things right by our showing of love here. Indeed, God makes us right; He forgives us. So too, we, as God’s own forgiven and redeemed children, are to be agents of justice as well.

We pray

Heavenly Father, in your love of justice you sent your Son to win us salvation. Teach us to love justice and give us strength to do what is right and pleasing in your sight. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

All I want for Christmas is...

Zeal

Read John 2:12-19

Zeal for His Father’s house consumed Jesus. It drove Him to cleanse the Temple. Zeal for you and me drove Him to come down from heaven and ascend the cross. Because of His zeal for you, to this day He watches over you and works in all things to lead you to where He is.

Where is our zeal? Wal-Mart shoppers trample a man to death getting in the doors the day after Thanksgiving. Is that our zeal? We have vehement desire. It is simply turned inward.

How many of us can say we are truly zealous for the Lord? Does your faith consume you, or is it merely a part of you?

The Lord our God is a zealous God (Ex. 20:5-6). He makes zealous people—men and women zealous for Him and for His ways. Our zeal for all other things must come from our zeal for Him. Our drive, our vehement desire must stem from Him. So we are zealous in our vocations: family, job, community. Husbands and wives zealously love one another and their children. Employees zealously serve their neighbor. Children zealously learn and grow. People zealously help one another. These come as a result of our zeal for Him. Zeal for our Father’s house puts us in His house, in His Word and in His ways.

Take a moment to think what your zeal for the Lord will drive you to do this Advent and Christmas—and beyond.

Jesus’ zeal drove Him to cleanse the Temple. His zeal drove Him to cleanse you so you could be His temple. His zeal for you drives Him to work in your life to draw you ever closer to Him.

We pray

Holy Lord, increase our zeal for your house. Grant us your Holy Spirit so we vehemently desire to live and learn your ways, to the glory of your holy Name. Amen.

All I want for Christmas is...

Love

Read Matthew 23:34-39

If there is a virtue that we as Americans most embrace, it is love. However, in Christ we come to embrace love in its fullest sense and in its purity.

We American are obsessed with romantic love. Movies, television shows, novels, our dreams and hopes often are centered in romantic love. Romantic love is indeed a good thing. On account of this kind of love, we lose ourselves for the beloved. However, we must recognize that romantic love is not the entirety of love. Without the other types of love, it can actually be destructive, as when a young man neglects his studies and friends for the sake of a girlfriend.

In his book *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis describes three other types of love: affection, friendship, and unconditional love. Affection is the kind of love that is shared among family members, a love that comes to us through familiarity. Friendship love is the kind of love that shares an interest. Friends do not look at each other with affection so much as they look together at something else, a common interest. These are good blessings along with romantic love.

But the greatest love is unconditional love, the love that is concerned with others without regard to any merit or worthiness in them. This is the love that motivated Christ to die for us. By the Holy Spirit, this is the love that is poured into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). This is a specifically Christian kind of love, and a complete gift of God in our redemption and sanctification.

We pray

Lord Jesus Christ, by your Spirit reign in our hearts, that we might display your love to our neighbors, for you live and reign with the Father and the Spirit, one God forever. Amen.

All I want for Christmas is...

Innocence

Read Isaiah 25:1-8

Some veterans have no desire to tell war stories. What they saw, what they experienced, they do not want to share. There are things left better unseen and unknown.

On the other hand, there has always been a strong temptation for human beings to feel inadequate if they turn away from all there is to know. We would rather be experienced than innocent. That is, we shun innocence until we “know better.” There are scientists who wished they had not learned the secrets of the atomic bomb. There are lovers who regret their carnal knowledge of too many partners. There are witches who regret their dabbling in mystic arts.

But for every cautionary tale of Frankenstein or Faust, the world raises up and celebrates a hundred more Don Juans and Da Vincis to mock the innocent.

Rejoicing in innocence requires, like all virtue, first fearing and loving God. It requires trusting Him to put you where you need to be and give you the wisdom you need for the day ahead. Celebrating innocence does not all have to be in retrospect, for Jesus invites us to become like the littlest among us (Mark 10:14-16). He invites us to the forgetfulness of forgiveness (Isa. 43:25). For now, we are people of the knowledge of good and evil, but soon an eternal childhood at play in the innocence of the Lord will dawn upon us.

Then we shall know innocence truly and that knowledge will be more precious than all we have known to this point.

We pray

Lord, we look forward to the return to innocence you have promised. Until that day, remove from our eyes and hearts the lust for sinful experience. Especially for our youth, tempted to worldliness earlier and earlier, we ask that you lengthen their days of innocence, even as you will lengthen our days with you into eternity, together with you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.