

John 1:9-18 – Advent 2 Wednesday – Advent Receive – December 10, 2025

+In Nomine Iesu+

Today, we continue our sermon series about four Advent disciplines. We are learning to *rest*, *receive*, *return*, and *repeat*. Historically, Advent has been a time for the disciplines of the Christian life. We fast. We keep traditions. We think less of ourselves—and more of others. We set aside extra attention for God’s Word.

Last week we talked about rest. And we found that rest is not the same as inactivity. I even left you with a challenge—something to do—ironically enough—to practice rest. In the spirit of the original meaning of leisure, I encouraged you to take a break from your work and responsibilities—in order to read something theologically demanding—to spend time in contemplating God’s Word—to sing—and then to really give your attention to the hymns we sing in Advent. And then have a conversation with someone about issues that matter.

The Scripture for our consideration gives us a little foretaste of Christmas day—as we import a portion of our Gospel reading from the Feast of the Incarnation of Our Lord. John, of all the Gospel writers, introduces us especially to the divine nature of Christ.

Remember what we celebrate on December 25. This is not just Jesus’ birthday. Here we remember that Jesus is true God—begotten of the Father from all eternity. And in space and time—in the little town of Bethlehem—well, really, first at Nazareth—Jesus is God with us—taking on a human nature—and a human body. He is true Man. But, Jesus is not doing this just because He can. This is not some cheap parlor trick. There is a purpose for the incarnation. It is for us. He comes with a mission and a purpose. And the whole thing is a gift.

God is in the business of giving. We celebrate this with our own gift giving this time of the year. Now, we don’t always do so well in this department. We give gifts—some are hits—some are misses. Please no fruitcakes this year. We can’t always recognize when we give the right gift—or we give a dud. Even the gifts we receive are often not that clear to us. We don’t always appreciate the value of a particular gift.

Even so, every gift tells us something about the giver—if we are observant—good, bad, or otherwise. And when we talk about God as a Giver, I always remember James 1, where Jesus’ own brother says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” God’s gifts are good and perfect—even when ours are not. God’s gifts are good and perfect—even when we don’t appreciate them.

I think John the Baptist is an excellent example of this. We gave him our attention on Sunday. But we don’t quite know what to make of John. He does not conform to the world around Him. He stands out in a bland and boring world. His appearance is striking and unusual. He lives an ascetic life—a disciplined life—alone in the wilderness—in contemplation and prayer. He rejects the life most people have adopted for themselves. He confronts our self-centered lives and calls us to repent.

And yet, He is a Prophet of God—the last and greatest of this noble band of men who bravely proclaimed the Word of God. John comes to bear witness to Jesus Christ

who is the Light of the World. He proclaims Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is John's testimony of Jesus that brings us into our Gospel reading today.

Just before our text, John the Theologian says of John the Baptist, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light."

For our special attention today, I want to pick up on that word *receive* from our text. And this is an appropriate place to start in this season of giving gifts. We are a little behind on shopping this year. I have a pastor friend that shops almost exclusively on Christmas Eve. Of course this means he married well—and his wife does almost all of the shopping. But Advent—and the Christmas season—are about giving and receiving God's good gifts.

Really, the whole Christian life is about receiving. Christian worship is about receiving. I think we often forget why we come to church. We come out of tradition. Or because it is the right thing to do. Or because Grandma expects us to come.

But there is even something incomplete about coming to church to give glory to God—as important as that is. We come to church to receive. But remember, we can't always recognize a good gift when we see one.

I remember talking with a woman once on her deathbed. And she asked me, "Pastor, why do you make church so boring?" I guess she lost her filter knowing that her life was almost over. She said something she always wanted to say. Her kids left the church because church was boring. But it shows you something of our inability to recognize good gifts when we see them.

We don't come to church to be entertained. We don't come to church to have an emotional experience. We come to church to receive the good gifts of God—forgiveness, life, and salvation. We come to learn the faith. We come to find the way that God would have us go. We come to know our God.

And we live our lives in such a way where we begin to appreciate the gifts that have been passed down to us in the rich traditions that we find in our hymns, in our liturgy, in our church year, in our sound doctrine. What we do here—Sunday in and Sunday out—is a gift that has been passed down from the saints who have come before us—from the church historic—even from Christ Himself.

The question is—can you see it? Can you recognize the gift? And even more, can you see in the gifts we receive in the church a reflection of the Giver Himself? What do you know about Christ from what He has given the church to do—what He has given to the church to be? If church is boring to you—perhaps the problem isn't the church at all.

And let's ask the same kind of question of our text today. What does our text say about Christ as the Giver of good gifts? What has He promised to give to His own people? There certainly is no promise of an easy life. As we see with John, things can get difficult when we follow Christ. But there are gifts—amazing blessings—for those with eyes to see.

Reading through our text, when we receive Christ—when we are regenerated children of God—we begin to see what He comes to do. And it is all laced with this great hope. In our text, the desperate condition of humanity—as it clings to sin and selfishness—as it doesn’t recognize the Savior of the world—is set against the goodness of God—and His overtures toward the world in Christ. We see God’s supernatural intervention in the incarnation.

This is the gift of God. This is light and life. This is grace and truth. Despite the fallenness and corruption of humanity—a corruption at the very heart of things—that blinds us to the goodness and faithfulness of God—nevertheless God empowers us to be transformed and become His children. Despite the darkness, One Light shined and this Light worked to illumine us—displaying the grace and truth of the Father—to all who would receive these good gifts.

So, in John 1, John calls us to receive God’s gifts. He calls us to receive a definitive understanding of who Jesus is. Jesus is the gift of God—and with Him come the other things we find in our text—light, grace, truth, glory. And really, what do we have that we have not received?

And it is the kind of stuff we sing about at Advent—and in the Christian season. Some of the richest hymns ever written about the nature of Christ will cross our lips over the next few weeks. Of course, this implies we are actually singing. And that we are actually listening.

But when we receive the testimony of these ancient hymns—we receive both the grand theology and God’s eternal promises into our hearts. We keep our Advent and Christmas seasons focused on the arrival of Jesus Christ in the incarnation—and the arrival of Jesus at the end of time.

In just a few weeks, we will hear a classic Christmas hymn. It’s written by the English Congregationalist minister Isaac Watts in the 18th century. You know this one, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King.”

I have heard Lutheran pastors say that this isn’t really a Christmas hymn. Whatever. I suppose if you mean that you can sing this in Advent or Easter—good enough. But we Lutheran pastors should stop arguing about such things on Facebook. We should all stop arguing on Facebook. But that’s a problem for another sermon.

And, although this joy is proclaimed to all people, only those whose minds and consciences are repentant are receptive to this Good News. Martin Luther said it this way, “Is not this a wonder that this joy would be dearest to those in whom the conscience was most disquieted? There, where fear and terror reigned, this glorious, precious sweet joy was to come, there where the human heart could grasp and receive it only with difficulty.”

Joy to the world. I think this one line defines Christmas better than anything. This is the gift He brings. Joy is found in receiving Jesus as our King. Let the arrival of Christ bring you light, grace, truth, and glory. And then find joy in such things. God gives us gifts that are far better than anything on our Christmas lists.

Christ has called us to a receptive life. Come to church to receive. Live all of life receiving His good gifts. Keep in mind the excellent gifts that are still yet to come. These practices will bring joy into your heart—knowing that every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of Lights.

“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about him, and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”

Next week, we look at another Advent discipline. We *return* to the Lord our God. We often talk about the return of Christ in the season of Advent. And rightly so. But I want to give some time to the ways in which we return I like the way the Prophet Joel says it—and we will leave things right here today.

“Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+*Soli Deo Gloria*+