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Christian Perspectives: Advent is right on the horizon

There is a pattern in Sunday Schools that if you are not sure of the right answer, the answer to most questions is ?Jesus?. Many churches have a Children's Focus. During one such Children's Focus, a Sunday School teacher was introducing the interim pastor. He had a large beard, was tall in stature and had a commanding presence; you might see where this is going. The children were told that their church had someone new that day and they were asked who that person might be. One child immediately put up his hand and said, ?Jesus?!

If one were to ask the Pharisees, Sadducees, the people of Jerusalem and all Judea who the person John the Baptist was talking about in his proclamation, the right answer would have been ?Jesus?. John the Baptist doesn't actually name Jesus, but he says what he will do. Jesus will baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire. John says before Jesus comes they must repent - ?Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.? I want to look at that phrase as we prepare for Christmas.

The Season of Advent (December 1 ? December 24) is a season during which we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus and his coming again. It is, for some clergy, a time that they battle against the norms of society. You will find in some churches no Christmas Carols before Christmas Eve, no Christmas decorations or Christmas Carol Service until the Christmas Season and no Sunday School Christmas activities, no, no, no ? I think you get the point. And they do have a point; Advent is the time to prepare for Christmas and the 12 days of the Christmas Season is the time to celebrate the birth of Jesus. And so what has happened, they say, is that we really celebrate Christmas during Advent and Christmas Day. Then, on Boxing Day, everything is put away and we get back to our regular lives and don't celebrate any more. I think that we can use some of the signs and symbols of Christmas during Advent as reminders of the celebration that is to come without celebrating the birth of Christ. At the same time, we know that any preparation in worship includes repentance and this certainly applies to celebrating Jesus' birth.

Here is another thought. If you think about it, all of the ?Christmas? movies are actually Advent movies. Most of them are about repentance and redemption. From the movie, Scrooge (with Alistair Sim, of course), to Elf, where we see the redemption of the father, played by James Caan, to Family Man where Nicholas Cage who is shown what his family would have like if he had chosen a different path. If we look at what John the Baptist proclaims, it leads both to Jesus and repentance. We know and proclaim that the Kingdom has come in Jesus and we are called to repent as we prepare to celebrate Christmas.

Forgiveness is always there in Jesus Christ, as we pray, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Nelson Mandela is an excellent example of someone who forgave those who trespassed against him and used the power he ultimately had for the good of the country and not to get back at those who put him in jail. We read what John the Baptist said, we repent, and we forgive as we have been forgiven as we prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate Christ's birth.

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