

2nd Sunday of Advent - Luke 3:1-6

It seems to happen earlier each year. No sooner is Halloween over and the stores are filled with Christmas music and decorations. In a way you can't blame the merchants of our country, seeing that 80% of their annual sales take place during the last two months of the year.

They refuse to pass by any opportunity to tell us what they have, what we want and what we really need to buy. There are Christmas sales, Christmas hours, Christmas specials and don't forget about Black Friday. We are besieged by opportunities to expand our Christmas shopping list.

What began as a simple feast to celebrate the birth of Jesus has become a consumer engine that drives our economy. It is no wonder that the spiritual meaning of Christmas, the voice of John the Baptist crying "Prepare the way of the Lord," is drowned out by the noise of commercial jingles and the ring of well-oiled cash registers.

What is a believing Christian to do? How can we celebrate the spiritual meaning of Christmas in this consumer society? There are two possible options. As the old saying goes, "You can either fight them or join them." One can try to eliminate the consumerism of Christmas or choose to infiltrate it and shift its focus.

Eliminating the consumerism of Christmas seems doomed to failure. Gift giving is too pervasive within our society. Besides, exchanging gifts with people we love is a beautiful part of this season.

Instead of trying to eliminate the consumerism of Christmas, it might be more productive to infiltrate it—to redirect the basic impulse to buy and to give.

Rather than reducing your Christmas shopping list, why not enlarge it?

There could be great benefit in adding one name. That name would be Jesus. Yes, I am suggesting you buy a gift for Jesus this Christmas.

Making this suggestion is not some trick or clever homiletic ploy. Think about it. There is something deeply personal about that dynamic of choosing the right gift for the person you love.

You need to ask, “Who is this person to me? How close? How important? What would he or she like for Christmas?” Why not direct that personal dynamic to our relationship with the Lord? After all, it is a very religious question to ask. Who is Christ to me? What would Jesus want to receive from me?

What would Jesus want for Christmas? Not a new Lexus. Not the latest computer game. He does not go out for dinner; so a gift certificate wouldn't do. He does not need a new cashmere coat or a Barbie doll. Cologne and jewelry would not be his style.

Now we all know He would be delighted with world peace or the elimination of hunger or disease. But those gifts might be out of our price range. After all, the question is, what would Jesus want that I could give?

Perhaps, he would want a bit more patience on my part with my spouse or the willingness to reach out to estranged members of my family to encourage reconciliation. I know he would be pleased if we could bring some joy into the life of that elderly person that lives alone in my neighborhood or to someone who has recently lost a loved one in death.

If I could identify a prejudice in my life against people of a different race or religion and work against it, that would make Him smile. Whatever I could do to be more just, more generous, more thankful, that would be a big hit on Christmas morning.

You see it is a profoundly religious question to ask what would Jesus want from me this Christmas. In asking it we reveal who we think Jesus is, who we are and what is the relationship that binds us together.

I would particularly encourage parents and grandparents to spend some time with your children and grandchildren around this question. We are always asking them, “What do **you** want for Christmas?” In so doing we are encouraging the consumerism of our society.

How much more healthy it would be if we could ask them what they plan to **give** this Christmas, and particularly what they would give to Jesus.

Spend some time with them. Come up with a few possibilities, three or four, and then let them choose which one they will give Him.

I think you will be edified to see how that question reveals who they think Jesus is and what they think he would want from them. The question is not limited to any age level. All of us can ask it and profit from it. For this question has the possibility of infiltrating the commercialism of our culture and refocusing the **spiritual** meaning of the season.

What does Jesus want from you this Christmas? There is no better question for us to carry through the Advent season than this. I know we are all busy in the upcoming weeks. There are only 17 days left before Christmas.

And the last thing any of us want is another name on our shopping list. But I would encourage you **not** to leave Jesus’ name off. For the gift that you buy for Him might truly be the highlight of your holiday season. Whatever else you do, make sure that there is something for Him under the tree this year. After all, Christmas is His birthday.