

12.12.21 A3 Advent Fruit

- I've always loved advent calendars like this one!
 - It's wonderful in these days before Christmas, to open a little door on an advent calendar, see a picture of something hidden beneath it, and read a verse of scripture that reminds us to prepare for the coming of Jesus into the world
 - For years, celebrating the advent season before Christmas has been a way to differentiate between Christmas in the church, and Christmas in the world – for us in the church, preparing for Christmas is about so much more than hanging strings of lights or getting the shopping done
 - In the church, advent is a season of waiting before Christmas, and during this season of waiting we hear God's promises that prepare the way for the birth of Jesus
 - For the Church, advent is a season to mark the days and weeks until God unveils God's self in the birth of a child to a lowly couple in an unusual delivery room
 - And advent calendars are a fun tool or instrument for daily devotions during the time of waiting
- But just like the world has tried to overwhelm Christmas with a flood of secular and non-religious symbols and messages, the world is ALSO beginning to make inroads in advent, by co-opting or appropriating our symbols
 - For a long time there have been advent calendars with little chocolate candies behind the doors along with the short scripture verses and prayers, and some years ago we found these calendars to be good gift for our kids when they were college students, because it gave them a little extra incentive in their busy student lives to open the doors for a tiny treat and a prayer
 - But now the world has caught on to advent calendars, and we're not just talking cheap little candies anymore
 - There is a gourmet cheese-a-day advent calendar, with a different cheese for each day in an advent cabinet with drawers
 - There are also wine, beer, and even bourbon advent calendars with a different potent beverage for each day

- And now there is a Chanel advent calendar that sells for \$895 which is shaped like a giant bottle of Chanel Number 5, and the drawer for each day reveals a cream, perfume, or jewelry for each day
- Now it MIGHT be possible to use these for advent devotions, but most likely things like gourmet cheese; wine, beer, or bourbon; or an array of Chanel products totally overshadow or obliterate any sense of Christian advent preparation
- And surely gourmet food and drink, not to mention designer perfume, are the exact opposite of God in the flesh soon-to-be-born to poor parents in a smelly barn with a hay-filled feed trough for a crib!
- Advents need to be reclaimed to prepare us for celebrating the birth of Jesus, and today's gospel helps.
- Today's gospel lesson offers a vision of advent that pulls us away from the secularized and commercialized offerings that now are invading advent
 - Today we hear not of infants, but of a grown-up John the Baptist who was preparing the way for the grown-up Jesus
 - It seems that John was drawing crowds not to a place of comfort or plush furnishings, but rather he was drawing crowds of all kinds of people out into the wilderness.
 - And with harsh words, John warned the crowds who came to listen to him: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. [Luke 3:7-8]"
 - Instead of being offended or put off by John's harsh warning, the people began to ask what they needed to do
 - To the crowds of people who asked what they should do, he said that if they had two coats, they should share one with someone who doesn't have any
 - To the tax collectors, the hated people who collaborated with the Roman conquerors by collecting taxes to pay for the occupying army, John told them not to collect any more than the taxes that were due from the people

- To the Gentile Roman soldiers who were members of the army of occupation, John told them that they should not use threats or intimidation to extort money from people
- Giving away your extra coat, not taking extra money, and not using force to extort – these were not easy for people who had been routinely either ignoring or hurting other people
- To do any of these things, in fact, called for a change of heart
- A change of heart... a new direction... in fact turning away from self and power and privilege, this is REALLY what repentance means
- Repentance means more than saying that you're sorry, the word repentance literally means to turn around into a new, God-oriented direction.
- And so, the change in behavior, the willingness to love God and serve other people – this is what John called BEARING FRUITS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE
 - This is a long way from gourmet cheeses, fine spirits, and designer fragrances
 - Instead, this is the way of advent – a time of devotion and preparation for the Savior soon to be born in the lowest of places and later to be put to death also in the lowest and most disgraceful way
 - John calls us to prepare for this God who comes to us, so that turned in a new direction by God, we may live repentant and fruitful lives that honor Jesus Christ, and which serve the people around us