



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea
The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida

“The cost of Christmas 2024”
Advent 3C – 12.15.24
Luke 3:7-18

A Homily by The Rev. Jo Popham

Americans spent \$762.8 Million on Halloween pumpkins this year. Final totals are not in, but this year's Halloween spending is projected at \$11.6 billion, a slight decrease in 2023's spending record of 12.2 billion. The total Christmas spending in the United States reached \$1.1 trillion last year. Christmas spending is anticipated to rise by 7% with the average shopper expected to spend \$1638 on gifts, travel and entertainment. But 3 out of 10 consumers, those with lower incomes, will spend much less.

\$12.2 billion would more than ensure clean water for every human being on earth. \$13 billion would feed all the hungry in the world.

It makes us pause to rethink our spending habits. What if we lived into our baptismal promises? I wonder, would we, could we, transform the world, or at least our little corner of the world? In a way St. Andrew's By-the-Sea does just that!

In today's Gospel according to Luke we have a unique invitation... not found in the other Gospel accounts. It addresses what we ought to do once we are baptized. What do we do after we have committed to renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God, to renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God, to turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior, to you put your whole trust in his grace and love, and obey him as your Lord? What are the powers of the world that hurt us and our brothers and sisters? Would sharing ourselves and our possessions be one step in embracing the grace and love of Jesus Christ? Could it be that simple? When we were baptized we

made promises – or promises were made on our behalf – and every time we renew our baptismal promises we answer: “I will with God’s help.”

Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

I will, with God’s help.

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

I will, with God’s help.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

I will, with God’s help.

And if we fulfill those promises, we would be living right, and we cannot help but fulfill the last two ...

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

I will, with God’s help.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

I will, with God’s help.

John the Baptizer stressed right living. And in Luke’s account right living – living right– has much to do with sharing what we have with our neighbor, living characterized by a special concern, sensitivity, and action on behalf of others – especially the poor – because we love and respect the dignity of all people.

John promised that the one coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill our baptismal promises. And she does!

I am not touting my family as always exercising good stewardship, but I will tell you that our five children will not be getting extravagant presents this year. Instead, they we gave a couple dozen sleeping bags, and hats and mittens/gloves to the Blue Door in their names.

If we live a righteous life – a life of generosity and good stewardship – a post-baptism life lived in service to our neighbor, caring for others, we become their

friends. The rich and the poor become one by our ministering to one another. John points us to Jesus who taught us to give to the poor and tend to those who do without. I trust that John and then Jesus no division between the haves and the have nots. Because our life working together with Christ brings all of our lives together for good. Together we CAN do greater things than we can imagine.

What we tend to remember about today's Gospel reading is John's condemnation – you brood of vipers – and we forget the message of hope that Baptism brings for all people, our brothers who have much and our sisters who have less than we have.

How could the incarnation change our stewardship this year? How might we share what we know in our hearts to be the true meaning of Christmas? What do we believe Christmas to be anyway?

I have shared the meaning of the 12 Days of Christmas with you before, but it deserves repeating.

From 1558 until 1829, many in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. During that era the carol “The 12 Days of Christmas” was written as a catechism song for young people; each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality that the children could – and we should – remember.

- The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ.
- Two turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments.
- Three French hens stood for faith, hope, and love.
- The four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke & John.
- The five golden rings recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.
- The six geese a-laying stood for the six days of creation.
- Seven swans a-swimming represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit—wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and the love of God.

- The eight maids a-milking were the eight beatitudes.
- Nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit--Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self Control.
- The ten lords a-leaping were the ten commandments.
- The eleven pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful disciples.
- The twelve drummers drumming symbolized the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.

“The 12 Days of Christmas” expressed Christians’ beliefs for four centuries. And they still do. If our true love's holiday shopping list included 12 Drummers Drumming, 11 Pipers Piping, 10 Lords-a-Leaping... and all of the other gifts from "The 12 Days of Christmas," that would cost us almost \$50,000 this year!¹

May we all become one through our generosity. May we serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. My friends, only then can we find true justice and peace. Lord, may it be so. Amen.

¹ \$49,263 to be exact. PNC Bank has released its 41st annual "Christmas Price Index," which calculates the change in price consumers can expect to pay for the items featured in the classic carol. Kristen Pillitteri is the contact for PNC Bank, (412) 762.4550, kristen.pillitteri@pnc.com.

	TRADITIONAL	INTERNET
	2024	2024
1 Partridge in a Pear Tree	\$ 370.18	\$ 510.18
Partridge	\$ 20.18	\$ 110.18
Pear Tree	\$ 350.00	\$ 400.00
2 Turtle Doves	\$ 750.00	\$ 850.00
3 French Hens	\$ 346.50	\$ 566.50
4 Calling Birds	\$ 599.96	\$ 560.00
5 Gold Rings	\$ 1,245.00	\$ 1,469.75
6 Geese-a-Laying	\$ 900.00	\$ 3,300.00
7 Swans-a-Swimming	\$ 13,125.00	\$ 15,325.00
8 Maids-a-Milking	\$ 58.00	\$ 570.24
9 Ladies Dancing	\$ 8,557.37	\$ 8,557.37
10 Lords-a-Leaping	\$ 15,579.65	\$ 15,579.65
11 Pipers Piping	\$ 3,714.96	\$ 3,245.00
12 Drummers Drumming	\$ 4,016.85	\$ 3,540.00
Total Christmas Price Index	\$ 49,263.47	\$ 54,073.69
True cost of Christmas in song	\$ 209,272.00	\$ 246,834.79
